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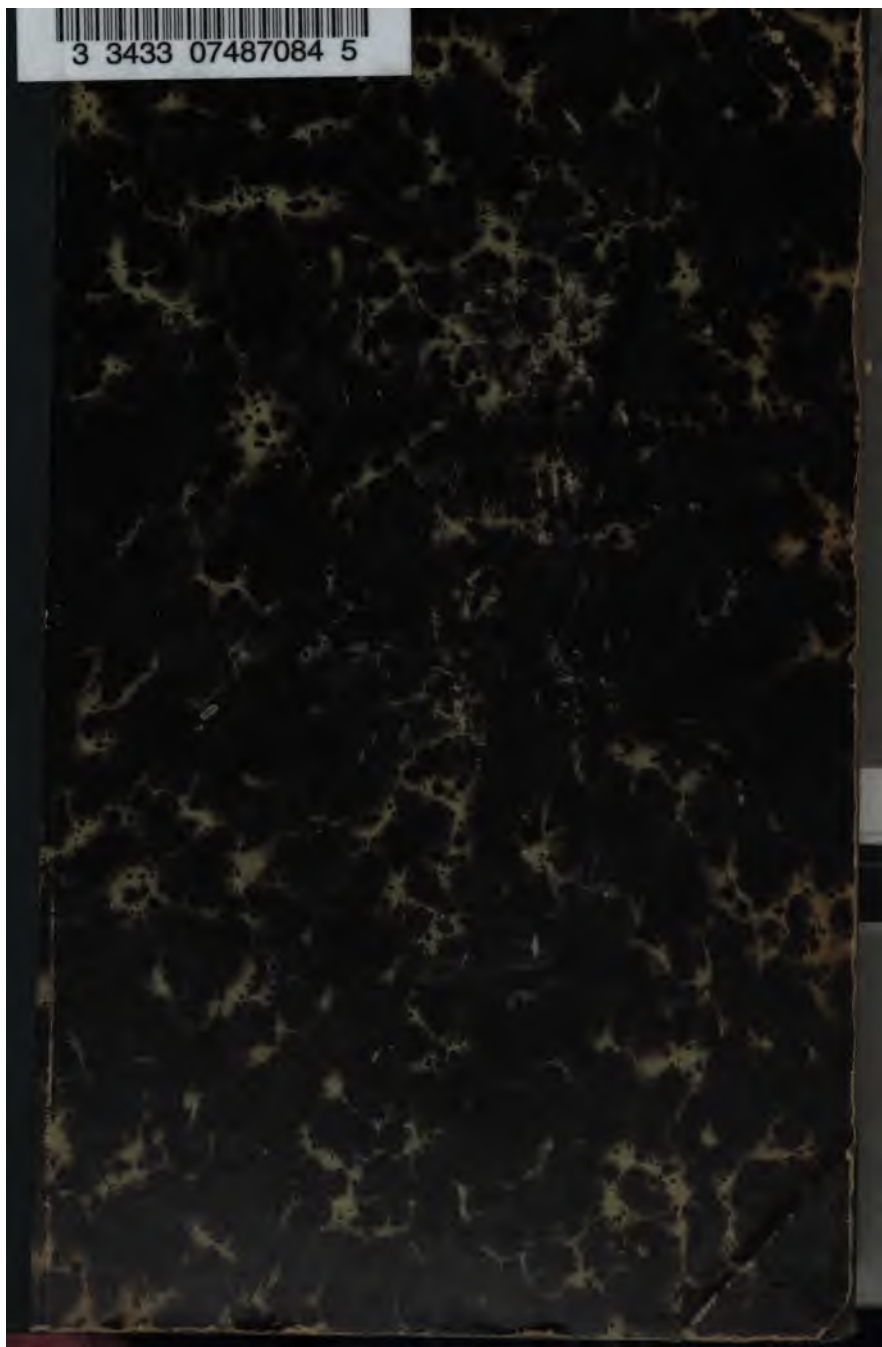
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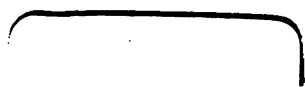
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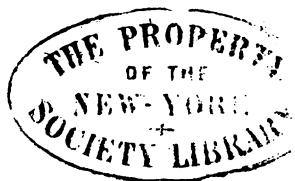
THE DEAR IRISH GIRL

BY

KATHARINE (TYNAN) Hinkson.

AUTHOR OF

"THE WAY OF A MAID," "OH, WHAT A PLAGUE IS LOVE!" ETC.

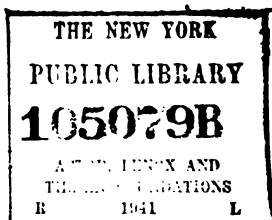


CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1899

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AN ONLY DAUGHTER ...	1
II. OLD FRIENDS AND NEW ...	18
III. A DELIVERER ...	22
IV. "TIME CANNOT CHANGE" ...	30
V. STEPPING WESTWARD ...	43
VI. ULTIMA THULE ...	49
VII. A MOUNTAIN WIZARD ...	61
VIII. ON COOLBAWN LAKE ...	77
IX. QUEER COMPANY ...	93
X. A RIFT IN THE LUTE ...	109
XI. A LUNCHEON-PARTY ...	125
XII. SECOND SIGHT ...	140
XIII. CONFIDENCES ...	158
XIV. AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN ...	175
XV. DEATH, LIKE A FRIEND'S VOICE ...	190
XVI. BITTER BREAD ...	206
XVII. A STRANGE COUNTRY ...	224

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. BOY'S LOVE	241
XIX. AN UNWELCOME SUITOR	247
XX. RESCUE	257
XXI. LOTUS LAND	266
XXII. A PERSISTENT LOVER	275
XXIII. A STRANGE MEETING	286
XXIV. THE NEW LOVE	297
XXV. THE OLD LOVE	304

THE DEAR IRISH GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

AN ONLY DAUGHTER.

BIDDY O'CONNOR lived with her father, in a huge straggling house in Merrion Square, one of the fashionable Dublin localities. Dr. O'Connor was a scholar, whose fame was almost world-wide. He did not look the least bit in the world like a student. He had enormous broad shoulders, somewhat bent, because of much stooping over a desk. His black beard and hair were becoming grizzled. His face had a wholesome colour, as if he were used to the sun and the sea-wind, which he was not, except for a happy six weeks in the year, when he and Biddy slipped away, like a pair of schoolboys, to the Continent, and lounged about in very shabby attire in

the most unfrequented places, enjoying themselves hugely. Father and daughter were good comrades for those six weeks. When they had returned to Dublin, the Doctor settled down to his microscope and his dead languages; the clouds of dust, which were thick on everything in his study, settled down on him, too, in the place he occupied often till the small hours of the morning; and Biddy roamed again at her own free will, getting a good deal of sweetness out of her free and independent life.

There had been a time when Biddy O'Connor had lain heavily on the hearts of the good matrons of Merrion Square. There were not a few ladies, widows and spinsters these, who would have been even satisfied to take Dr. O'Connor himself into the bargain, so that they might thereby obtain the mothering of his neglected little girl. There had not been wanting officious folk to draw the Doctor's attention to the fact that Biddy was running wild. Biddy herself had dismissed her nurse at an early age, and as often as not, in her lanky childhood, had gone about happily with her pink legs appearing through the holes in her stockings under her dusty velvet frock.



Poor Dr. O'Connor had observed Biddy's deficiencies when they were pointed out to him, and had suffered much vague discomfort while considering what was best to be done. Mrs. Rody Flaherty, who arranged the affairs of half Dublin, and who had been chaperoning her three tall, lean sisters about for more years than they liked to remember, once took upon herself, as a very old friend, to suggest that for everybody's sake it would be well if he were to give his house a new mistress.

Dr. O'Connor dismissed the suggestion with a gentle dignity, which was an armour he could assume on occasion. He left Mrs. Rody uncertain as to whether he had understood her or not. There would have been no uncertainty if that good lady could have seen him after her departure.

Over his study mantel-shelf there was a portrait of Biddy's mother, a pale woman with a certain opulent beauty in her large calm features, framed in waves of red hair that fell about her shoulders. The portrait had very full red lips, and eyes as blue as the blue convolvulus, and the artist had put life and meaning into those eyes. As Dr. O'Connor pondered within himself, with a half-sad derision,

Mrs. Rody Flaherty's preposterous suggestion, he smiled at the portrait. The eyes looked back at him with an answering derision. That woman up there, though she was dead and gone many years, was sure of her empire.

Dr. O'Connor compromised matters with his own conscience by engaging a very superior nurse for his young daughter. Biddy at this time was ten, an age when many little ladies are in the nursery; but it must be confessed that the doctor trembled when he thought of what Miss Biddy would say when she found she was to be returned to the bondage from which she had long ago emancipated herself.

What Biddy said was to refuse flatly to receive the new potentate. She stood before her father, a small rebel, with her hands quaintly locked behind her back, and said, in response to his pleas and commands, that she would do anything, anything at all he wished, but that she could not go back and be a baby. She would darn her stockings, she would keep her clothes in order, she would even strive to brush her hair till it was smooth as Eva Flaherty's. Anything in the world she would do except bend her neck to the intolerable yoke he proposed to place upon it.

"You would never," said Biddy, "have asked me to have a nurse, only some of the old Square cats have been worrying you about me."

She looked at him with such gravely accusing eyes that he had to smile. She was standing below her mother's picture. The small, pale face repeated to some extent the lines of the portrait, but the woman's features were altered in the child to something more piquant. Biddy's small white nose had a suggestion of being turned up. Her full red lips had a sweet scorn about them. The child had the woman's eyes, but the waving red hair of the portrait was altered in the child to curling hair of a beautiful red brown. It stood out round her head like an angel's aureole. When you had pulled a curl to its full length it looked red; when you had released it, and it had sprung back, it had only so much suggestion of red gold as you see in brown Venetian beads.


Her father, having surveyed her obstinate face for a few minutes, pulled out one of those long curls.

"Very well, Biddy," he said, helplessly. "But you needn't try the impossible task of smoothing your curls, though I hope you won't forget your

promise about the stockings being kept mended. All the same, I don't know how this fine lady whom I'd engaged to look after you will bear her dismissal."

"She'll have to bear it," said Biddy, with precocious philosophy. "We all have to bear it sometimes; haven't we?"

Dr. O'Connor with shameful cowardice wrote rather a handsome cheque for the nurse, who was expected at any hour, and left the rest to Biddy. It was Biddy herself who received the lady when she arrived, with more boxes than would have held the entire wardrobes of the house. It was Biddy who affably invited her into the dining-room, while with a wave of her hand she dismissed Peter, the dusty old man-servant, who waited for orders concerning those boxes. It was Biddy's worldly wisdom that made her draw the woman's attention to her cheque before explaining sweetly that Dr. O'Connor had found it expedient to make other arrangements at the eleventh hour. After the shrill, childish explanation was over, the nurse, with a flounce of her head, pocketed her cheque and departed; and when Biddy from the



hall door had watched the piled-up cab fade into distance, she drew a long breath, resting her small hands on her hips, as she stood with a languid air as of relief after a strain.


"Wouldn't have suited us, Peter," she said to the old servant, who was watching her with a dawning smile in eyes as affectionate as a dog's.

"No, then, Miss Biddy," assented Peter, heartily. "We'd have had rings round us between her and Mrs. Behan."

Mrs. Behan with Peter made up the Doctor's establishment. She was an admirable cook, as the men who attended Dr. O'Connor's occasional little dinner-parties were cordially agreed. But she had the born cook's love of cooking and distaste for anything else, and the condition of the rest of the house did not disturb her. She was too old and too used to it to notice the drifts of dust; and then, having learnt long ago that, dust or no dust, nothing was to be touched in the Doctor's study, she had gradually applied that principle to the rest of the house. She might have had the smartest of young housemaids under her if she had only willed, but she was intolerant of

the bestreamered "hussies" she saw at the other houses in the Square, and would not have agreed with one for an hour. The Doctor was quite satisfied with her ; and as for Biddy, she would have disliked any addition to the establishment as much as Mrs. Behan herself, for she had a shrewd idea that a servant with more spick-and-span ways would object to all her foundlings, and especially to the dear dogs.

Biddy had made the house a menagerie of queer beasts. She scarcely ever took a walk abroad that she did not pick up a homeless, hungry, and hunted creature. Occasionally it was a deserted cat in an area, or, if she went to the country, it might be a broken-winged chicken or a gaping young bird which had fallen from the nest. But most often it was a dog. From the time she could walk alone Biddy had strolled independently, and times out of mind she had run the gauntlet of the Dublin street urchins, leading home across the town the most forlorn and starved specimens of doghood. If they proved incurable, she herself would sorrowfully take them on a Saturday to the Dogs' Home, where they might be put out of pain and their remains decently



disposed of. If they were curable, Biddy generally accomplished the cure ; she was learned in sulphur washes and ointments, and in salves within and without, for dog troubles.

Sometimes the invalid turned out quite a handsome beast, and then it was easy for Biddy to find a home for him. Her own heart ached more tenderly over the ugly mongrel kind, and these were left on her hands. As they got well they were promoted from the hospital in the tiny flagged court at the back—by courtesy “the back garden”—to have the run of the house.

As may be supposed, there was a considerable number of them, though Biddy loved each one individually as much as if there was no subdivision of the call upon her affections. They were lovable as mongrels are ; it is your thorough-bred dog who has a contempt for making himself generally agreeable ; and they overran the house with the true mongrel’s vivacity. Usually every velvet chair in the drawing-room had its canine occupant, who was as ready to change places as the people are in a certain round game ; and the changing was accomplished with a chorus of yelps that made even Biddy

thrust her fingers in her little pink ears. As for Dr. O'Connor, he scarcely ever returned to his study after an absence without sitting down on a dog. Biddy's *protégés* increased so rapidly, that none but she could identify them; and though theoretically they were forbidden the Doctor's study, there was always one bold enough to insinuate his presence when the door was by chance left open.

Certainly a smart housemaid would have felt herself hopelessly out of place in Dr. O'Connor's house.

Biddy kept her promise about the stockings, and as she grew older she manifested a feeling for her frocks which found expression in queer colours and shapes nearly as distressing to Merrion Square as her pink heels had been in earlier days. Having gone in short skirts and legginess for a longer period than Merrion Square considered quite proper, she passed to long skirts with a surprising suddenness. At fifteen she had found a complaisant dress-maker, who followed her ideas intelligently, and was even interested in them.

Biddy spent a good many hours in the great lonely gallery in Merrion Square, not considering

her frocks, but devoutly worshipping the pictures, and brought away some ideas on her attire by the way. The result was charming but often very *outré*. Biddy's pelisse of deep orange velvet and flat cap of the same might make the winter street brilliant, but respectable people thought them little short of scandalous.

Whatever the wise women might say about it, Biddy's was a happy life—a life, too, in which the virtues other than the housewifely thrived. Biddy would never have made a good housekeeper. If heredity had anything to say to it she could not; for her mother, during those few happy passionate years in which Roderick O'Connor had been a young man, had conducted her woman's kingdom in a slipshod fashion.

Anyhow, in that love-litten, dusty house, Biddy O'Connor had shot up slender and graceful as a young fawn. The dust did not dim her warm, creamy complexion, nor the colours of her eyes and hair. Merrion Square is not far away from the mountains and the sea; and Biddy's days were spent out-of-doors with her dogs, more often than not in the sylvan atmosphere. She was the child of

the free air, and unvexed by backboards or stays, governesses or pianos, she walked with the free gait of a young sylvan goddess accustomed to the woods and the mountain side.

When she was older and went to school, her manner of walking was looked upon by the Misses Pilkington as rather masculine; and the dancing-mistress had special instructions to attend to Miss O'Connor's positions, with a view to rendering her more ladylike. But with Biddy the bad habits were engrained, and Madame Celestine, after a long and wearisome struggle, gave up in despair the effort to make Biddy O'Connor genteel.

CHAPTER II.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW.

BIDDY always remembered her first meeting with Mrs. Montague. She had come in from school, and was passing her father's study door, when it opened, and the Doctor appeared on the threshold.

"Come in, my dear," he said. "I want to introduce you to a very old friend of your mother."

Biddy had taken off her gaily beribboned hat, and was swinging it on one finger preparatory to mounting the stairs; in her surprise she followed her father, still absently swinging it.

There was a brilliant, dark-faced lady sitting close to the Doctor's desk. Biddy's first idea was that this lady must be indeed privileged to have gained the *entrée* to the study. The lady came to meet her with both hands held out, took her hands, and looked closely into her face. Biddy answered that long

gaze frankly. Mrs. Montague lingeringly withdrew her gaze, and went back to her chair, while Biddy sat down demurely facing her.


"But good heavens!" said the lady, with a long-drawn sigh. "What a likeness! You did not prepare me for it, Roderick."

Dr. O'Connor looked at Biddy with a tenderness which was as much for the dead as for the living.

"So you see it, Margaret," he said. "I wanted to see if it would seem as striking to you as it does to me. Yes, Biddy is very like her mother."

Mrs. Montague thought in her own mind that the child was more beautiful than the woman in the portrait. Biddy was yet lank and unformed, but there was promise of noble maturity in the lines of the growing figure, which would presently be too richly beautiful for the canons of the dressmaker. Mrs. Montague saw all the possibilities, saw that creamy face and classical head, with its aureole of bronze hair, set on a form graciously developed and full of soft outlines. The girl was already very tall, and was beginning to fill out.

Biddy, on her side, was regarding the lady whom



her father called Margaret with frank admiration. She wondered why she had never heard of this charming person before. Mrs. Montague looked so fresh, so dainty in her heliotrope gown, that Biddy, suddenly awakened to the dustiness of the room, felt a dawning dissatisfaction.

"I rescued Mrs. Montague from the drawing-room, where Peter had left her," the Doctor said. "She was looking vainly for a chair to sit down upon, for she was too kind-hearted to dislodge any of your pets, Biddy."

Mrs. Montague looked at the girl with a spark of raillery in her eyes.

"Why do you keep so many dogs, Biddy?" she asked. "And how can you ever tell one from another?"

"Oh, they're as different as possible!" said Biddy, easily. "Quite as different as human beings."

Just then she woke up to a sense of her duties as hostess, and departed in search of Peter and tea. When the door had closed behind her, Mrs. Montague turned to Dr. O'Connor.

"Your girl is going to be beautiful, Roderick," she

said. "When she is old enough, you must lend her to me for a season."

"But your globe-trotting, Margaret?"

"Even of that I shall weary in time, Roderick. I shall begin to feel old."

There was no sign of age in the spirited face or in the alert, slender figure, and Dr. O'Connor smiled at the suggestion.

"You will never grow old and tired like the rest of us," he said; "and you will never be content to settle down."

"You are wrong, Roderick. I should be content now, if I had some creature to make a home for. I envy you your Biddy. But what would a childless woman like me do setting up house?"

"You might marry again."

Mrs. Montague gave a swift look at the imperious face of the dead wife before she answered.

"I never shall. I don't pretend that the suggestion hurts me as it would if I had loved my husband. I have missed the best thing in the world for a woman, and I shall never find it now."

"But Colonel Montague was good to you."

"He was good. But he was half a lifetime older

than I, and he never expected love. I gave him affection and duty, and he was satisfied. I spent a great many years by a sick-bed before I entered on that career of globe-trotting which amuses me. I think it is the pent-up restlessness of those years keeps me going now."

The Doctor looked at her very kindly. "I wonder how it was," he said, "that a woman like you should not have married for love."

Her delicate, grey-gloved hands trembled in her lap. Then she spoke with quiet assurance.

"Because the man I loved had chosen another woman."

The Doctor blushed as if he had stupidly surprised a woman's secret.

"I beg your pardon, Margaret," he said, humbly.

"Dear soul!" thought the woman within herself. "I was quite safe in saying it. He has no more suspicion now than he had twenty-five years ago."

Biddy came in with tea then, and the conversation became general. Mrs. Montague might have been gratified if she could have known Biddy's feelings towards herself. The girl's heart had gone out kindly to this bright-eyed, distinguished-looking

woman, who was so fresh and handsome although her hair was grey.

The dinner was an unwonted festivity that evening. This newly discovered old friend came from her hotel, beautifully dressed, and with a manner which was the happiest mixture of interest and affection. With waxlights in silver candlesticks, and her mother's fine damask napery, with old china and heavy Waterford glass, Biddy had done her best, and the table looked well. The Doctor was brushed and smoothed for the occasion, and Biddy had put on one of her queer velvet gowns, out of the dusky softness of which her full neck rose, carrying her bright head like a flower.

Mrs. Montague was "going on" in the morning. She was always "going on," she explained; and her visit to the West of Ireland was to be followed by a yachting tour with some friends, which was to end as the wind and their own sweet wills directed them.

"But you will come back," said Biddy, appealingly,— "you will not just appear like this and vanish again for years?"

"I will come back," said Mrs. Montague, "or

you will come to me, Biddy, when I have settled down in London, and your father can spare you."

Biddy beamed joyously at the suggestion.

The Doctor walked back with Mrs. Montague to her hotel. They talked much on their way of his young daughter. "Take care of yourself for her sake, Roderick," said the lady, earnestly; and then, as if one thought led to another, she asked—

"Has she any women relatives this side of the water?"

"None," replied the Doctor. "We are a very lonely pair, Biddy and I. The nearest relative she has is her mother's step-sister. You remember Blanche, Margaret?"

"I remember."

"And remembering," said the Doctor, dryly, "you will understand that we have seen little of Blanche. Even in my dear wife's lifetime communications between those strangely unlike half-sisters had quite ceased. I do not even know if Blanche and her husband are still in Surrey Square. Our lives have run on such different lines."

"Well, Roderick, I feel moved to say to you that, if your Biddy ever wants a friend, I should like to be

that friend. I do not know why I say this, because she has you, and is likely to have you for long, happily. Only this world of ours is an inn of strange partings as well as meetings. See how long we have been parted, who have kept all the while loyal affection for each other ! ”

“ I trust our next meeting will not be after so long an interval, Margaret,” said the Doctor, gravely. “ And thank you for what you say about the child. I have not, perhaps, made friends for her as I ought ; and then, too, she is a strange child and does not make friends easily. A good many women have shown interest in her, but she has not responded.”

The Doctor smiled faintly, thinking of the many efficient matrons who would have pruned this wild young shoot of his. Then he went on speaking.

“ Biddy is unlike other children. Perhaps I have been wrong in letting her grow her own way so entirely ; but now I think it is too late to make a change.”

“ Don’t try to change her,” said the lady, emphatically. “ She is beautiful as she is, though I can well believe that she does not assimilate with other children. There is enough in this

world after a pattern. Let Biddy go her unconventional way."

"Ah, but," said Dr. O'Connor—and his voice had a tinge of sadness,—“that is a sad way for any of us, a woman especially, unless she is strong enough to stand by herself. The world will have us all of a pattern, and if we cannot conform will do her best to punish us for our unhappy singularity.”

“If it ever comes to my lot to stand between her and the world,” said Mrs. Montague, with sudden earnestness, “I will do it, Roderick, be sure.”

Their hands met and clasped. It was as though they made a solemn compact over the child.


CHAPTER III.

A DELIVERER.

“There’s a feast undated yet :
Both our true lives hold it fast
The first day we ever met.”

MRS. MONTAGUE left Dublin the next morning, and, a little later in the day, Biddy received by post an old pearl necklet with a little diamond heart-shaped clasp, “to wear in memory of her mother’s friend.” Biddy was not likely to forget the donor; her heart had gone out to that charming vision with an affection as full and impulsive as it was rare with her. Few human beings had reached her heart, though so many dumb creatures had.

She wore the necklet, a little later, at a young people’s dance in the Square. Her father had rather made a point of her attending this festivity. Perhaps his conscience had been pricking him since that talk



with his old friend, that he had allowed his little girl to grow up strange among her kind.

Biddy set her teeth to it like a Spartan. She felt, with a passionate dislike, that this world where she must enter was not her world; but she never winced under her father's entreating eyes, helpless with a masculine helplessness.

She came to him before she went out, and he held her at arm's length while he gazed fondly at the delightfully picturesque figure she made in her gala dress. It was a short-waisted, long-skirted thing of white satin, out of which Biddy's shoulders rose soft and warm-coloured. Mrs. Montague's pearls were round her neck, milky as they. Her father looked at her with tender pride. "My dear Biddy!" he said, in loving commendation, and, happily, quite unconscious of how Biddy dreaded her evening party.


It loomed before her as a great ordeal, from the moment when Peter should leave her in the lighted hall, amid a bustle of guests arriving, till he should appear to conduct her back again to the dear safety of her own home.

She saw no face she knew in the cloakroom, and

so timidly followed in the wake of a stout lady with two blooming daughters on their way to the ballroom.

There was a crowd of young men about the ball-room door. Dancing was in full swing in the big drawing-room, but the smaller one was provided with a kind of dais for the chaperons, and every recess had its low seats for those who were not dancing. Biddy, never lifting her eyes, stole into this room under shelter of her comfortable convoy. Her hostess stood just within the doors. She did not notice Biddy while she greeted the stout lady warmly. Then Biddy realized that she must somehow shift for herself.

She glided halfway across the room, her heart beating and her head swimming with nervous shyness. She looked around for a seat, and could see none. All she saw was a row of faces, old and young, watching her behind the fluttering fans. Poor Biddy stopped, with a nervous impulse to turn back and run—run as if from some great danger, and never stop running till she got home again. She looked to right and left, flurried and helpless, and a mist rose before her eyes.



Just then a young man, who had been watching her from the doorway, came to her side.

"Let me find you a seat," he said. "There is none in the room just now, but I know where there is a comfortable one vacant."

Biddy, with a great sense of deliverance, put her hand on his arm. He took her from the glare of the lights, and from under all those eyes, and brought her out on the staircase. Halfway up there was a little alcove filled with palms and ornamental plants, and empty now the dancing had begun. With a quiet kindness he placed her just where big palm fronds sheltered her from the throng passing up and down the staircase.

"Now wait for me a minute, please," he said, "and I'll see about getting you some tea."

He went back to the ballroom door, and looked in. Seeing what he had come in search of, he steered his way dexterously across the room, to where a pretty, gentle-eyed girl was watching the scene with interest.

"I want you, Carrie," he said, with brotherly peremptoriness; "if you are not going to dance."

"Oh no," she said, "I have been too busy seeing after the boys and girls for Mrs. Blake. We elders

must not dance till they are all enjoying themselves."

"Well, Carrie, I've found an outlet for your benevolence. I've just left a lovely child who came in here alone and nearly fainted with shyness before I could come to her rescue. I don't know who she is, but you'd better come and make her happy."

"Very well, Maurice," she answered, threading her way with him across the ballroom.

They found Biddy in her alcove.

"I have brought my cousin, Miss La Touche," he said, "to get some tea too. Now we can all have it together."

For the first time, Biddy looked up at his face. She saw a dark handsome young man with a boyish smile, and very bright grey eyes. She looked then at Miss La Touche, and felt comfortably that she had fallen among friends.

"I think we'll send you for the tea, Maurice," said the young lady. "We don't feel equal to going to the tea-room, and it is so cool and quiet here. Do you think you can manage to bring it?"

"An O'Hara was never beaten yet," he said, laughing, as he departed.

Before he could return, Biddy and Miss La Touche were chatting like old friends. Caroline La Touche found it easy to make people happy, because she only thought of them. She was a slight, graceful girl, with chestnut hair rippling away from her small ears, and a clear oval face, beautiful with the shining of her kind soul through it. Her hair was coiled heavily at the base of her small charming head. She looked good, people said, even before they knew how much good she did in the world. Biddy thought she looked wistful too. And she was right; for Miss La Touche's young lover, who had never a penny to bless himself with, was away with his regiment in India, and the long, long engagement seemed to dwindle in a hopeless perspective.

Presently the young man returned, having pressed a waiter into his service, with a little table, the tea, and a dish of strawberries. Biddy had never enjoyed a tea so much. She ate her strawberries in a kind of placid wonder at her own good fortune, and afterwards danced with Maurice O'Hara. She had dreaded any of those callow growing boys asking her, but with this partner things were different; and Biddy,

to whom dancing came by nature, found it all so blissful that she felt like Cinderella at the ball when it was all over, and she knew she must go.


But she did not part from her new friends without hope. As she left them, Miss La Touche said—

“But I may call upon you, may I not? My mother is too delicate for visiting; but I should find it a great pleasure to come, for we are newly settled in Dublin, and I have not yet made many friends.”

Biddy blushed to the roots of her hair with pleasure as she murmured her “Yes.” The young man went with her to the stairfoot, and delivered her into Peter’s hands when she had cloaked herself.

“We shall meet again, Miss Biddy,” he said, “though I return to my Western wilds in a few days. When I come back my cousin shall take me to see you, if she may?”

He lifted up Biddy’s brown little hands with a half-playful tenderness—for she was only a little girl—and kissed them. Biddy felt herself growing



very hot. But she was not at all displeased. She went home and to bed, with her mind in a confused, happy flurry. Maurice O'Hara seemed to her the realization of all her dreams of ideal lovers and heroes. She dreamt of him that night, and for many a night to come she thought upon him when only the stars saw her, till she fell asleep.

Every one noticed about this time a new dreaminess and softness in Biddy. Even her father saw it. And some of the kind Merrion Square ladies took heart of grace over Biddy's state, concluding that at last she was growing up out of her wild childhood, and was beginning to be like other girls.

And perhaps the most redeeming sign was that Biddy—wonder of wonders—began to grow tidy.

CHAPTER IV.

"TIME CANNOT CHANGE."

"Since first I saw your face I resolved
To honour and renown you."

It was quite a long time before Biddy and her hero met after all. The young Connaught squire found his own life and duties fairly engrossing. He was the master of a big, bare, lonely tract of country, the natural unkindliness of which had been intensified and increased by generations of the wild O'Haras, who had rack-rented their tenants gaily from father to son, and had, despite that, managed to retain the unquestioning devotion of the people.

The young scion of the house was in many ways a painful falling off from the irresponsible traditions of his family. When his father, Andrew O'Hara, had married the most beautiful of the beautiful La Touches, he had not reckoned on the new strain of

conscience and responsibility she was going to introduce into the O'Hara blood.

Mrs. O'Hara soon found that there was not much to be made of her husband. Perhaps, fortunately for his boy, he did not live past his young manhood.

To him those years of his married life were a garden of rose-leaves. His beautiful Puritan was no less sweet and lovely because she often disapproved of his ways. He stifled her remonstrances with lover's kisses, and with peals of great boyish laughter, which even she found irresistible for the moment. He used to tell her that a woman's duty was to keep her house and her husband's love, and not to bother with other things; and he never guessed the half-resentful trouble his gay lightness stirred in his wife's breast when she was alone and from under the sway his personal beauty and charm always held for her.

However, at thirty, Andrew O'Hara, being out shooting, fell when crossing a fence, and, the trigger of his gun catching on a hazel twig, the contents of the two barrels were lodged in his handsome head.

His young widow, when the first desolation of

her mourning was over, set herself to bring up the boy he had left her, in the way he should go. She was a wise woman, and while she trained the boy's mind from the beginning to take such a view of his responsibilities as was enough to make the O'Haras turn in their graves, she encouraged in him no less the cultivation of the body, which is so eminently wholesome for the mind, and the love for manly sport and pastime which she thought should be the heritage of an O'Hara.

At twenty the lad could ride as straight to hounds as his father before him, was good at shooting and fishing, and could swim in the lake at Coolbawn or against the Atlantic rollers off the coast like a young otter. At school he had played football and cricket, and, when he came home, had attained the proud position of being captain of the county cricket team.

He was practical to the back of that, and reared and sold young horses with judgment in that country of horse-breeding. He could buy and sell sheep and cattle with any farmer, and required no middleman to do his business for him. He did what never an O'Hara before him

had done—he farmed a great slice of his own inheritance; and having entered on farming amid the head-shakes of many shrewd old farmers, he came presently to win the half-willing praise of those defeated prophets.

He was not all hard practical. Unlike his class, and reverting, heaven knows how far back, he took a quietly enthusiastic interest in the country of his birth, in her history, her language, her literature, and all that differentiated her from the dominant partner.

Only once a year, and then for a short week, did he feel himself drawn towards Dublin.

The Horse Show week is the third week of August. Well may one write its name in capitals, for during that week there is a recrudescence of the old glories of the Irish capital. Hotels and lodging-houses are crammed to overflowing; spare bedrooms are at a premium among your friends; the town lights up like a bed of daffodils and tulips with the fine frocks of the tall, handsome country girls; there is a wild flight of outside cars from morning till night, and at the hours of going to and returning from the show-yard

at Ballsbridge you cross the street at the peril of your life.

During that week the scant theatrical entertainment provided by the Irish metropolis is taxed to its utmost. Through the long windows of every hotel dining-room you see variegated groups of diners, in evening dress, as gay as a fashionable London *table d'hôte* in June. You meet tall, grey, handsome fathers with their young giants of sons, like a breath of the country, in every street.

As a rule the heavens open for that week, and at Ballsbridge the gaily dressed ladies are ferried across the liquid mud when they venture from under cover. But does it damp their gaiety? Not a whit. They never dream of abandoning the fine frocks prepared for ideal festival weather; and as for an Irish girl being dismayed by a drop of rain—they call a bucketful a drop in Ireland—not a bit of it! The rain *may* put their hair out of curl, but it only brings fresher roses on their cheeks and a dewier shining in their eyes.

August therefore drew Maurice O'Hara to town, and his presence in the quiet house where his cousin and her mother lived added sensibly to the gaiety of

things there. He insisted on Carrie for that one week of the year dropping her rôle of unofficial Sister of Mercy, and giving herself up to the joy of her youth. Mrs. La Touche never complained of being thus deserted, for he was unselfishly willing to give his evenings to her, and she was fond of Maurice. She and her sister-in-law had never had very much in common, and Mrs. La Touche, somewhat ungratefully towards her daughter, used openly to lament that Cicely, so much stronger and more self-reliant, had the strong arm of masculine protection, while she was given only a girl. She was rather a doleful woman, and had accepted the invalid's part perhaps too easily. She had given nothing of herself to her daughter, who was a genuine La Touche, she used to complain, and might have been taken for Cicely's girl any day of the year.

Maurice, during this gala week, would coax his aunt out-of-doors for one or two outings. If it was fine weather he took her for a drive, carefully choosing himself the most steady horse and the springiest cushions to be had. Once he had persuaded her to a box at the theatre, and for a happy few hours Mrs. La Touche had forgotten to be an invalid.

But with the young man's going the grey silence settled again on the house, where there was no air of youth ; the mother turned round for another year to her half-comatose state of existence, and her daughter to her works of charity, to those services to the sick and maimed members of Christ with which she strove to satisfy her natural longings after husband, home, and children.

Every August for four years, when Maurice O'Hara came to Dublin, Biddy was abroad with her father, and so for so long they never met.

Biddy's friendship with Carrie La Touche had strengthened with the years. It was made up of diverse elements of pity, admiration, and love. She knew Carrie's almost hopeless love-story, her patient devotion to her mother, her untiring work for the poor. She knew all the fluctuations of her friend's slender hopes ; for Carrie's lover had had misfortune after misfortune. Once he was to have come home on leave, but he had had jungle fever, during which and his convalescence his poor sweetheart had wasted almost to a ghost from suspense and fear.

No one knew anything of this but Biddy, and

Biddy's almost frantic sympathy was very sweet to the lonely girl, whose girlhood was, alas, rapidly disappearing. Biddy was like one outside the gates of love's garden, to whom every fragrant breath came with almost intolerable exquisiteness. She would sit for hours listening to Carrie's confidences, her hands clasped about her knees, her eyes looking far away from her world into experiences she had never known.

She had not forgotten Maurice O'Hara. Her childish ideal was something yet to be dreamed of. She was too shy about it ever to ask Carrie anything of him, especially since one day, when she was left alone for a few minutes in Carrie's little sitting-room, she had taken his portrait from the mantelshelf, and, after steadily looking at it for a few minutes, had kissed it. When she went home she began to make for herself a picture of him as he was in her memory, and, having worked at it feverishly for some hours, put it, face downwards, in a locked drawer, where she kept many of her treasures. But she did not forget that sudden involuntary betrayal of her childish heart to herself.

As for Maurice O'Hara, he had not quite forgotten

her. For two seasons he had remembered to ask Carrie, "And how is the little red-haired girl?" The third and fourth year he forgot to ask till Carrie casually mentioned her. The fifth year he would not have asked, probably, but the fifth year they met, and it was April, and a riotous spring, with leaf and blossom tumbling over each other to reach the sun after a hard winter, and such a courting time for birds as would be hard to excel.

Maurice had exhibited some cattle at the Spring Show, and had come to town for a few days. He was standing in Mrs. La Touche's little boudoir, looking much too big for the place, when Biddy came in unannounced. She was dressed in a cool print, grey-blue as lavender, and her arms were full of tulips, which she was bringing to the invalid.

For an instant she did not recognize him standing against the light, but he recognized her with a thrill of pleasure. The sight of this Flora, as he called her to himself, was like the spring stirring in his blood, like the exultation he had often felt riding hard in the morning air among lanes white with hawthorn.

Mrs. La Touche would have introduced them,

but he stepped quickly forward, and their hands met.

"Why, it is Miss Biddy!" he said. "But not the Miss Biddy I remember. Have you quite forgotten Maurice O'Hara?"

Biddy had gone pale, where another girl would have blushed; but he, being unfamiliar with her expressions, detected no change. He only saw a face like a white rose, with a startling contrast of full scarlet lips and blue eyes, and all about it Biddy's orange-coloured hair, which still obstinately refused to be anything but a halo.

"Ah, Miss Biddy," he said again, "times are changed. Do you remember how frightened you were of the eyes at Mrs. Blake's dance? You would not need a poor fellow like me to rescue you now."

Biddy's eyes looked at him childishly shy. He wondered impatiently how she would speak. If she had volunteered any speech that night long ago it must have been too low for him to remember her voice. When she spoke it was with a rich Irish brogue that had somehow a suggestion of lamentation, and he felt a sense of satisfaction in its sweetness.

"You were very good to me that night long ago,"

she said, "and you are good to remember it. But I haven't forgotten you, either. You see I couldn't, for I called one of my dogs after you. I found him the next day, and as I had so many dogs, and I had nearly exhausted my list of names, I called him O'Hara."

"I hope he was a nice specimen of doghood."

"Oh, he was a dear dog!"—with a sigh,—“not handsome, you know; he had lost an ear fighting, and one of his eyes was gone. But he was very affectionate, and so intelligent. I have very seldom liked any dog so well."

"Shall I have the pleasure of meeting him when I call?"

"Oh no; he's dead, dear dog."

"But I may come, as my visit wasn't intended for him?"

"You may come," said Biddy, seriously.

"When do you go home, Maurice?" asked the invalid from her chair.

"I'm not sure what day yet. I haven't been away from home since last Horse Show, and am rather inclined to make a fortnight of it. I've earned a holiday by close attention to work."

"You have indeed," assented his aunt.

Now the truth was that Maurice, who usually found Dublin supportable only so long as there was something in his particular line a-doing, had intended to return to the West on the Saturday at latest. But within the short time since his old acquaintance had entered the room he had felt a strong desire to linger a little, and see more of this fascinating damsel.

He walked home with Biddy across the square. She was half hesitating whether to offer him tea or not, but the matter was arranged for her by her father, who came up with them. She introduced O'Hara.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said the Doctor, cordially. "I've been reading an article of yours in the *Arena*. If you can spare me a few minutes I should like to show you some manuscripts I have, which bear on that particular question."

O'Hara received the invitation with an evident pleasure and sense of honour that went to Biddy's heart. She was so intensely proud of her father that she longed for all the world to appreciate him as she did. The two men entered the Doctor's study, and when, some time later, Biddy joined them with

the tea, she found them engrossed in a common interest that excluded even her. It made her so happy to see this childish ideal of hers on such good terms with her worshipped father, that she felt nothing of the desire to attract his thoughts to herself which a lesser-minded girl might have had.


When she had given them their tea, and they had returned with fresh zest to poring over the manuscript, Biddy quietly left them together. It was some hours later when, perched on her window-seat, with the dying sun in her hair, Biddy saw O'Hara leaving the house. She felt full of joy because of his visit. He was going to be their friend, her father's friend and hers, and what sweeter thing could happen? "Nothing sweeter," said Biddy; for as yet the veils of her childhood were about her, and the impersonal love was enough.

CHAPTER V.

STEPPING WESTWARD.

THE remaining week of Maurice O'Hara's stay was long enough to cement a friendship between him and Dr. O'Connor. Young men instinctively liked the distinguished scholar. Behind his learning he was so simple, so romantic, so human, that it put him somewhat at a disadvantage with the elderly men who were his contemporaries and his equals. The young fellows of his class at the University fairly worshipped him, though few had succeeded in piercing behind the veil of his dreamy absent-mindedness to anything like intimacy.

There was hardly a day of that week on which the newly-made friends did not meet. Biddy would come in from her morning walk to find O'Hara closeted with her father; or in the afternoon a




message would come upstairs that Mr. O'Hara would dine; or it might be in the late evening, when Biddy was thinking of bed, that the young man would come in, with an overcoat over his evening dress, on his way home from dinner or theatre.

Biddy saw little of him except when he was present at meals, nor did she crave sight of him. It gave her a placid content to know that he was under the same roof with her.

That he and her father should like each other so well was happiness enough for Biddy. She shared her father's contempt for dons and donnishness. The College had never known so unconventional and erratic a don as Dr. O'Connor, and yet, while Biddy rejoiced in his unlikeness to those others, she resented the isolation in which to some extent her father stood as regarded his fellows.

Once or twice in the evening, when she knew O'Hara was with her father, she had stolen downstairs and listened with her ear against the heavy mahogany door to the unwonted buzz of the two masculine voices. Then she had gone upstairs and



to bed, happy since under this one roof was all she held most dear.

Biddy had never concealed from herself her idealization of the young Connaught squire. At school she had listened to damsels comparing their conquests, and discussing young men, with a half-ashamed wonder that they could talk so freely about such things. Hers was a childish fancy, but she had kept it secret and sacred.


During those years in which Biddy's hero had been out of sight, no fear that he might marry had disturbed her. Indeed, at the time, her feeling for him was so impersonal that, if she had pictured a Mrs. Maurice O'Hara, it would have been an ideal being, who would only rank lower in her affectionate admiration than Maurice himself. Despite her independent growth, or perhaps because of it, Biddy kept her childhood far later than more sophisticated, if less thoughtful, damsels.

Before Maurice left town he had warmly pressed Biddy and her father to spend the first weeks of the long vacation at Coolbawn, an invitation supplemented later by a charmingly friendly letter from Mrs. O'Hara, in which she expressed the pleasure

it would give her to welcome her son's friends. This letter came in the week following Maurice's departure, and opened up a new vista of delightful anticipation in Biddy's mind. When she found that Caroline La Touche was to make one of the party her cup of pleasure was full, for she was shy of new faces and the impression she might create on new people, but with this familiar friend to support her she felt she was safe.

The two months intervening went by slowly, but the longed-for July day came at last which was to end under the roof of Coolbawn. Biddy had said good-bye to the dogs, and to Mrs. Behan and Peter, with many injunctions as to the treatment her bereaved pets were to receive in her absence. Carrie had left her mother in the congenial companionship of a certain Aunt Sophie, a gentle and lachrymose lady, whose company for Mrs. La Touche had been suggested by Maurice O'Hara while his cousin took a much-needed holiday.

Biddy loved even the details of a journey, as at the theatre she enjoyed the preliminary wait almost as much as the performance itself. She felt radiantly happy when she was seated in a corner



of the horsebox, by courtesy called a first-class carriage, which was to convey them to the West, and looked with keen appreciation at the provision her father had made for her comfort—the sandwiches, the fresh fruit, the tiny flask of wine, the bundle of illustrated papers.

Her interest never flagged while the train bore them past brown bogs, with little pools of blue water, and red and white cattle chewing the pensive cud on many a causeway. She sat up with bright, untired eyes in her corner, watching the country unroll itself, with now a broad sheet of a lake, again the serrated outline of a mountain range—homesteads and farmsteads, pasture and ploughland, hamlets and towns; all alike interested her, and the more that her father was ready with history and archæology to fill in the outline of a river, or give life to the placid country.

It was quite late in the afternoon when the party reached the town on the two banks of a river, where they were to leave the train and be met by the carriage from Coolbawn. Biddy was looking out eagerly as the train steamed into the station, and was the first to catch sight of O'Hara, bronzed

and handsome in his knickerbocker suit of grey homespun. When their carriage had passed him he began to run, as eager as a boy, and was at the door as soon as it opened, to help the ladies out and collect their numerous packages.

CHAPTER VI.

ULTIMA THULE.

"WELCOME to the West," he called out cheerfully. "How are you, Doctor? Left the mother all right, Carrie? I needn't ask are you tired, Miss Biddy. You bring the town freshness to brighten up jaded country eyes."

And indeed Biddy was blooming, and looked even unwontedly gay and cheerful.

"I've brought the waggonette, and will drive myself. Larry, here, will see to the traps"—indicating a red-haired youth who, for all his smart livery, bore a humorous and intelligent aspect quite unlike the expressionless woodenness of the trained servant. "Be sure and take only what belongs to you, Larry."

"All right, Mr. Maurice. I'll wait round till the

gentleman or the ladies is plazed to point out their own."

"I'll get the ladies comfortably seated, Doctor, while we're identifying the luggage. That rascal, Larry, would bag everything in the luggage van if we left it to him. The last time I came down with a handbag I found him claiming golf-sticks, rugs, fishing-tackle, gun-cases, and the whole sporting rig of the officers of the 200th, who were just taking up their station here. He'd have got them, too, the scoundrel, if I hadn't interfered; for Mick Finn, the porter, and the station-master stood by him. He thinks the O'Haras have as much claim to their neighbours' property now as in the old days, when they used to raid the cattle of the unfortunate petty chiefs around them."

Larry grinned appreciatively as his master moved away with the young ladies. They passed out of the station between the rows of rival carmen, who were also touts for the various hotels. These were calling lustily the claims of their different hostelries, waving at the same time their disreputable whips.

"Yez'll be for the 'Royal,' ladies. Queen's own

hotel, where her Majesty and Prince Albert always puts up."

" 'The O'Hara Arms,' ladies. Get out o' the ladies' way, Tim Whelan; sure it isn't the likes of you and your ould 'Royal' the ladies 'ud be thinkin' of! "

"Yez'll be for 'Flanagan's,' ladies," said a little red-haired wheedling man, "the natest and quietest spot in the town. Overlooks the Doon and the Salmon Falls."

"Arrah, get out of this wid your 'Flanagan's.' D'ye think 'tis at your dirty little public-house such jools of ladies 'ud be puttin' up? "

From this babel of invitation the two girls were rescued by Maurice O'Hara, who came briskly to the front. All the whips went up to the tattered caubeens in salutation, which he acknowledged cheerfully, greeting each man by name.

"Any wan in the train for us, Misther Maurice? " was the simultaneous question.

"Only a commercial gentleman who is arranging his samples."

A groan broke from the band, and all the ragged Jehus scampered out of the station as if the devil were at their heels.

"You see, the commercial gentleman will just shoulder his samples and walk, Miss Biddy," said O'Hara, explanatorily. "Commercial gentlemen are not supposed to be profitable."

They reached the waggonette in time to see the disappointed touts whipping up their steeds, and with wild yells and whistles encouraging them on their mad way up the corkscrew streets and down the steep inclines that led to the river.

"Don't they ever fall?" asked Biddy, in wonder, looking after that wild flight.

"The horses? never. You see, they're used to it. You should see them tumble down Slieve Bawn, with the stones flying about their heads, and in a perfect storm of fireworks! They sometimes pitch a Saxon tourist out over their ears. But whether from the softness of the earth hereabouts or the Saxon hard-headedness, I never heard of any serious harm being done."

A few minutes later the luggage was packed away in Larry's cart, the latter protesting the while that there was a "weeshy-bit of a handy fishin' basket unclaimed in the van, an' the name on it was as like O'Hara as two pays," and the party were off.

Everywhere through the little town the Squire of Coolbawn was received with signs of friendship. Shopkeepers saluted him from the shop doors; the women on the pavements stood to smile at him; an urchin turned a cart-wheel on the road, and righted himself with an enthusiastic "Hurroo, Mister Maurice!" A woman selling dillisk blessed his good-looking O'Hara face.

"They seem to like you, my lad," said the Doctor, noting these signs of popularity with approval.

"Oh yes, we're popular," said the young man, "but the thanks are due rather to my mother than to me: she's a great woman, as you'll see, Doctor. During my long minority she managed the old place, and did a good deal to pull it out of the slough into which many generations of O'Haras had plunged it. Did it all easily, too; never evicted a tenant the whole time. It's due to her that we had little trouble in the League days."

"A good mother makes a good son," said the Doctor, smiling.

"You're too kind to say so, sir; but honestly, I believe my virtues are derived from her, and my faults are my own."


"Where would she place your patriotic leanings, my boy?"

Maurice laughed.

"I'm afraid among my faults. I must 'throw back' to some remote ancestor for them; for the mother is as remote from the people here as if she hailed from a rectory in the home counties, or was an English 'squireess' rather than a widow of one of the wild O'Haras. I don't derive them from my father's side either; for though the O'Haras were eaten up with Connaught pride, and would have thought a Guelph muddy-blooded by the side of an O'Hara, they had little leaning towards the side of the people, that I ever heard of."

"I believe you derived no further back than your foster mother, Maurice," said his cousin. "You must take Dr. O'Connor to see Nannie. He'll be interested in her. I suppose she keeps pretty well, Maurice?"

"She's pretty well and very comfortable at the lodge on the upper road, where my mother persuaded her to move after poor Paudeen was drowned last November. Paudeen was my old nurse's only son, Doctor. He was a big lad when I first remember



him; he must have been about forty when he lost his life, but he is always 'her good child' to poor Nannie."


"He was a fisherman?" asked the Doctor, with his ready interest in what interested others.

"Yes, he came of a race of fishermen; and though I often wanted him to work in the gardens at Coolbawn, and live in the comfortable gate-lodge his mother has now, the sea drew him. It took all my mother's persuasions to induce her to leave her cabin afterwards. She's hale and hearty, though she has lost her last glimmer of sight. She's supposed to have the second sight, though, by way of compensation."

"You must induce Maurice to take you round to see a number of his old friends in the bogs and the mountains, Doctor," said Miss La Touche again. "It's a privilege he's chary of, but perhaps he'll extend it to you."

"I hope you will, my lad," said the Doctor, heartily.

"With pleasure, sir," said the young man. "There'll be no difficulty with you, I expect. They're very reticent, and shut up as close as an



oyster if they suspect want of sympathy or mere idle curiosity. They trust me, but I have been burning my shins by their turf fires, man and boy, for a matter of a quarter of a century. They'll know when I bring you that you're to be treated as a friend, and you'll do the rest yourself."

"I'll do my best," said the Doctor, simply.


"It will pave the way with them that you can speak the Irish."

"Scholar's Irish, my lad, which I hope they'll understand. I must learn as much as I can from you and them, while I'm here, of the colloquial Irish."

"Oh how lovely!" cried Biddy, suddenly. She had been listening to the conversation with interest up to this; but now the waggonette having swept round a corner of the hilly road brought them in sight of the blue waters of the lake, and the mountains on the other side softly ringing it in.

O'Hara looked well pleased.

"I always think, Miss Biddy, that there was never such a jewel of a lake as ours," he said emphatically. "It is equally lovely whether in the quiet sunshine as now, or when the west wind



piles up the clouds to make shadows like black velvet on the green hills yonder, or in wintry storms, or at night by moonlight when it is a glass of broken silver. It can wear no aspect I do not know and love. But here we are at the gate of Coolbawn!"

They had pulled up before a wide entrance gate, with a postern in the wall beside it, through which a little house covered with creepers showed invitingly. The gate was opened by a pretty young woman, who dropped a low curtesy, and the waggonette swept through, and up a winding road overshadowed with elms and beeches. For a few minutes the road ascended, then began to descend again, and, taking a wide curve, which almost swept the shores of the lake, brought them out in front of a long, grey-stone house.

"We are in the country of grey stone, Miss Biddy," said O'Hara, coming round to help his guest to alight. "But Coolbawn has put on her best aspect to receive you."

It was indeed so, for the roses which embowered the windows and nodded under the gables of the house were all in bloom, and the pink and yellow

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made a warm contrast with the stone. Coolbawn was built more fancifully than is common in Ireland. The roof was steep, and a couple of dormer windows looked over the edge of it. Below, the design was quite indefinite—a bow window with a balcony above it here, an oriel there. The door retired into shade around a corner. Halfway along the house stretched a glass-roofed verandah with the grey-blue of a giant heliotrope in bloom draping the walls. On the velvety lawn, sloping to the lake's edge, were clumps of hydrangea, pale blue and pink, blooming brightly in this sheltered spot. The house looked south; it was sheltered east and west by old trees.

There was a black donkey grazing on the lawn; and two beautiful red setters stood up as they arrived, and came frisking to welcome their master. The donkey followed gravely, with the assurance of an established pet.

“Down, Rory! Down, Flora!” said the young man, withdrawing himself laughingly from the caresses of the dogs. “Well, Shawn, old fellow?”—as the donkey thrust his velvety nose into the outstretched hand. “You will like all our beasts, Miss Biddy. These are only an instalment. See,

they have not forgotten Carrie!" For, more decorously, the animals were greeting Miss La Touche.

An old man in livery now came to the open door.

"The mistress is in the drawing-room, Master Maurice, and I've just brought in tea."

"Thank you, Michael," said O'Hara, leading the way for his guest.

In the drawing-room a tall, slender woman stood up to receive them. She was very like Carrie La Touche. She had the same oval face and sweet expression; her large, well-opened eyes looked out on the world with as clear a gaze; but there were lines in the broad brow and about the capable mouth, and in the twist of auburn hair at the back of her head were streaks of grey. She smiled at her son, as he approached, with a maternal fondness. She looked motherly, and for all her height and slenderness, there was a largeness of limb, a generous outline about her, which suggested motherhood.

She came forward with a faint gracious smile.

"So glad to welcome you, Dr. O'Connor. And, Carrie, my dear, I hope you are not very tired. And so this is Miss Biddy!"

She took Biddy's face between her firm white hands, and kissed it. Biddy thought it a delightful way of showing welcome, and blushed joyously. She felt she was going to like Mrs. O'Hara very nearly as much as she liked her son.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOUNTAIN WIZARD.

LIFE at Coolbawn was for the visitor an existence of lotus-eating. In winter there was plenty of hunting to be had in the neighbourhood, and a good many dinners and dances, though neighbours were far apart. But in summer the country folk had dispersed here and there; some to Bray or to Salthill for the sea-bathing; the more ambitious to English watering-places or to places abroad.

Mrs. O'Hara was home-keeping. She used to plead that there were so many things needing her presence that she could not possibly be absent; and though she had relinquished the management of the land to her son, her duties in the house seemed to be absorbing.

In the morning, after breakfast, she left the two

girls to keep each other company while she spent a couple of hours over household matters.

Biddy protested with truth that she hoped she would not be taken anywhere outside Coolbawn. There were so many delightful resources within the place itself. She and Carrie spent the morning in the gardens which climbed the hill at the back, and received all the south sun. It was delightful to find the scarlet strawberries under the running green leaves, and the big crimson and white raspberries; the currants hung like bunches of jewels among the bushes, and cherries were ripe on the red wall. Carrie La Touche, protesting that the sun was bound to give Biddy a headache, sat in a little green arbour, and was content to receive the fruit Biddy brought her in a big cabbage leaf. Presently Mrs. O'Hara joined them, and they went the round of the gardens with her, while she snipped the full-blown roses into a basket she carried, and directed here and there the operations of the gardener, Phelim, and his boys.

Maurice O'Hara had taken the Doctor for a walk, first about the farm and then further afield.

"In the afternoon, Miss Biddy," he said, "I am

at your service, and will row you about the lake, or take you driving as you will. The Doctor and I are going to visit one Murty O'Shaughnessy, a piper, and a treasury of folk-song. It is an experiment to bring the Doctor, and I should not dare to spring a young lady upon Murty as well without preparation, else I should beg the favour of your company."

"What would he do if I were to come?" said Biddy, laughing.

"Oh, he wouldn't eat you. He'd be as gentle and courteous as possible, but he would shut up like an oyster in his shell. He's a witch-doctor as well as a piper; but he's chary about the secrets of his craft. He knows that the old songs and the old secrets are as dear to me as to himself, and so makes me free of them."

"You have a way with him."

"I suppose so. I hope he will make friends with your father too, after a while; he's worth knowing. He is really a curious old fellow, and his knowledge of herbs and simples is quite remarkable."

So while Biddy was sunning herself among the roses and strawberries, the two men were tramping high among the heather and bracken, through peat

and furze, amid which they often paused to gaze across the open country, where, far away through a dip in the hills, they caught sight of a silver flash of the sea.

Murty O'Shaughnessy's cabin was perched high on the hillside—a low place, thatched with rotten black scraws, and looking as if the first wind from over the mountains would lift and tear it to fragments. It was insignificant as to size by the boulders about, and was scarcely more considerable in appearance than a ragged last year's nest. At a little distance it was hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding peat, and above it the bare rocks rose high in air, stained gold with lichens and purple with heather, and intersected by little clear streams running merrily down their rust-coloured channels.

At the door a very old dog lay sunning himself, and received Maurice with a friendly wag of his tail.

The Doctor, following O'Hara's example, stooped his head low to enter the low door.

"God save all here!" said O'Hara, with the usual Irish greeting.

"God save you kindly, Misther Maurice! 'Tis

good for sore eyes to see you," responded a thin, wheezy voice out of the darkness.

The cabin was full of acrid, dry smoke, and as the two men entered, a couple of hens flew up from the mud floor, which was full of holes. The old dog rose with a deep sigh from his sunny post, and drove off the shrieking and fluttering intruders.

There was a little window set deep in the brown walls, and after a second or two the Doctor was able to make out the figure of the old man, sitting by a heap of smouldering turf ashes.

"Come in, come in!" he wheezed. "Musha, bad luck to yez for hins, yez unmannerly bastes! That's right, Pinch, make short work of them. Ye're kindly welcome, Misther Maurice, and whosoever you've brought. My eyes is not what they wor."

He blinked up at the Doctor, shoving towards him, at the same time, a three-legged stool. Maurice fetched a corresponding stool for himself out of a corner, and squatted on it beside the old man, whose hand he took and pressed with an evident affectionateness.

"This is Dr. O'Connor, Murty, from Trinity College. He is a great friend of mine, and I thought

I might take the liberty of bringing him to see you. He takes as much interest as I do in our old songs, and charms, and stories. I've told him you're a very knowledgeable man, Murty."

"Ay, ay," grunted the old fellow. "An' he's a great scholar from Thrinity College? Sure what knowledge would poor ould Murty have that 'ud intherest a great gentleman like him?"

Dr. O'Connor had begun to make out his host's face. It was as brown as a nut, and as withered as a little old russet apple. His cheeks were faintly streaked with hard red lines. The white hair came down straight and soft in the middle of his forehead, and his black eyes shone piercingly intelligent from under shaggy white brows. Murty was evidently very old.

Dr. O'Connor settled himself squarely on his little stool.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. O'Shaughnessy," he said. "You've a great deal of knowledge that it makes me humble to think of. I suppose it's natural I should be interested in Celtic matters, seeing that I'm an O'Connor of Connaught myself, though my father did me the doubtful service of

having me educated mainly outside my own country."

"You're none the worse for that, sir," said the old man, visibly thawing. "Eddication as it is now in our misfortunate country is not such as 'ud make poor Ireland's sons good sons, in a manner of spakin'. An' so you belong to the ould ancient stock. Well, then, you're not likely to be thinkin' the ould *ranns* an' bits o' songs just so mûch ould foolishness."

"No, indeed, Mr. O'Shaughnessy," said the Doctor, heartily.

At this stage Maurice put his hand in his pocket and drew out a bottle of whisky and a packet of tobacco.

"Something better than what the Widow Nolan would sell you, Murty," he said apologetically.

The old man took it with an expression of innocent surprise, and read the label on the bottle and the imprint on the tobacco backwards and forwards before he spoke.

"Think o' that now, Misther Maurice! Who'd have thought of the like but yourself? Well, you was ever an' always the same from the time you

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were a small rogueen of a boy. An' I'm not denyin' 'tis a great comfort to have the dhrop o' sperits when I'm badly taken with the bronchaytis. 'Tis a fine medicine entirely, as the blessed Apostle Paul mintions."

"The house is too damp for you, Murty. Why don't you move down to Mrs. Costello's? She tells me she's always urging you, and you'd be more comfortable there than here."

"'Deed, she's a good little woman, Kitty Costello, though she's my own sister's daughter. But, look here, Misther Maurice. It wouldn't suit me at all bein' among people. *Them you know of* don't like a lot o' people about. They like the quiet mountain side, or the heart o' the wood, or the bit of a white-thorn in a big field, or their own little ratheens. Let alone that women is faint-hearted, and I'm misdoubtin' that often Kitty wouldn't like the company I'd be keepin'."

"But she wouldn't see them, Murty!"

"She might. She's of my own blood, an' I wouldn't like to run the risk of frightenin' the craythur."

"You're not afraid of them?"

"Why should I be? I'm at home among them. An' they're quiet, civil-spoken little people when you don't cross them," he went on, shaking his old head. "Many's the wan I've talked wid that's lying quiet enough in Rathronan Churchyard. Howsomdever, ghost or fairy, there's nought to be afraid of, when you have the blessin' of God an' a good conscience."

"You're not one of those who think it wrong to have dealings with the other world, Mr. O'Shaughnessy?" said the Doctor.

"No, thin, sir, I didn't ax to have the knowledge laid on me. It came without my axin'. It's not long ago Father Tom O'Flaherty had a wrastle wid me on the same subject. He overed it up to me that there was no such thing as 'the gentry'! 'God forgive your riverence,' says I, 'you'll be sayin' next that there's no such a thing as the blessed saints at all, at all.'"

"What did Father Tom say to that?" asked Maurice, laughing.

"He lifted up his hands in holy horror. 'Why, you misfortunit ould haythen!' says he. 'You don't mane to say you puts the fairies and the saints on

the wan footin'?' 'No, thin,' says I; 'I've seen the wan,' says I, 'an' I takes the other on faith.' 'Och, be this an' be that,' says he. 'You're past prayin' for.' But I could see he was amused entirely. An' all the same he had me down to the cow when the crathur was took sick a week ago. 'There's a great halin',' says he, 'in the yerbs of the earth,' lettin' on to me an' himself that he'd no notion of fairy spells at all. But, sure, if I'd seen fit to say a few quare words over the crathur, 'tis his riverence 'ud have been lookin' the other way, I'll go bail."

"A malignant fairy would be rather a terrible creature, I suppose?" said the Doctor.

"You may say so, sir," said the old fellow, in evident good faith. "I've met them on my road home at night many a time, an' a little distance off 'twould be a little thing like a withered leaf skippin' in your path, but as you got nearer 'twould swell an' swell an' grow tall an' threatenin' like a great tree on a mountain side. But I'm never afeared of them. I've the words to put the fear in them. 'Lave me in pace,' I says, addressin' them by name, an' makin' the sign fornint them, an' the thing drifts

off like a mist, an' there I see the road in the moon-light before me, an' nothin' of more harm upon it thin a playful bit of a mountain rabbit scuttin' into its hole."

"I suppose your medicines are held in high esteem, Mr. O'Shaughnessy?"

"You may say so, sir. Dr. Devlin—a pleasant gentleman he is—always calls me Dr. O'Shaughnessy, no less."

The old fellow cackled a thin laugh.

"He overed to me that I was destroyin' his practice, an' had better come into partnership. 'Ay, doctor,' says I; 'you wid the fees an' me wid the red tickets. That is how we'd divide. Let alone that my practice is more wid the animal thin the human. An' 'tis more sinsible an' kindly the baste is, nine times out of ten. I'd rather be havin' them for patients any day."

The old fellow was evidently in the most gracious of humours. It was long since Maurice had seen him so expansive; and it moved him to ask, before they left, that Murty should favour the Doctor with a blow on the pipes.

"An' willin'," said Murty, cheerfully, "though

I'll go bail the gentleman is used to the fine music that'd put me an' my pipes out o' consate wid ourselves."

He took down the pipes from a corner shelf, and fingering them over softly began to play, first slowly and mournfully, then quickening to riotous jigs and planxties. As he played, his eyes lit up, and his whole little withered frame seemed to jig to the music. After a succession of the gay tunes he passed on again to the wistful music. He played a queer eerie strain.

"Now, that," he said, "is a very sweet, touchin' song, of a young man beyond the bog of Mullagh, whose love was bewitched from him by a fairy lady. Time was I could have sung the tune like a black-bird, but now I must make way for the young throat. Misther Maurice agra, give the gentleman your Englishin' of it!"

O'Hara, without more ado, began to sing to the wild, melancholy air, in a rich voice that filled the old cabin—

“ ‘ Let us go to the mountains,’
She said, ‘ and the valleys,
Where the deer are enchanted,
And through the dark alleys

The raven goes calling
His wizardry olden.
And we went to the mountains.
My love she is golden,

“With her coolun of amber,
The weight of spun tresses ;
And the white, stainless bosom
No lover possesses.
O the throat white as lime is,
The red mouth and scornful !
The raven went calling
His portents all mournful.

“’Twas in the dark mountains
The madness possessed me
For the lips that an instant
Bent down and caressed me.
It is dark in the mountains,
Where lost souls are pining,
And a throat like a white flame
In darkness is shining.”

While the song was going on Murty had drawn out from his breast a young blackbird, which perched in a queer, awkward fashion on his finger, gazing at him with bright unfrightened eyes.

“’Tis the sweet voice you have, Misther Maurice ; near as sweet as himself here has locked up in his yellow bill. An’ a song to match the voice—a song himself will be singin’ one day when he finds his music,” said the old fellow.

"Thank you, Murty; I couldn't have a sweeter compliment. Is this a new patient?"

"He was a patient, an' you may say it, when I picked him up wid a fine fracture in the little claween of him. The boys below at Mary Burke's had him fettered to a stick in the ground, an' him hoppin' about on the whole leg, an' th' other in the worst way yez ever seen, and the feathers starin' on him, an' him heart-bruk between the pain and the fear."

"You seem to have made a good job of him."

"'Deed he's doin' fairly. Murty's poultices are good for bird or human. An' his liberty's waitin' for him as soon as I can trust him on the little claw."

"You're a bird-doctor, too, Mr. O'Shaughnessy, and a competent one, I see," said Dr. O'Connor.

"Indeed, they're grateful bits of things to doctor. Sometimes they're very unwillin' to part company after the cure; an' if you'll believe me, sir, 'tis many a song they come back to sing round Murty's cabin of an evenin'. Now, this fellow here, because he's young, will be hard set to leave me at all. Won't you, honey?"

The bird broke into a hoarse whistle that might have been intended for an answer.

"He seems to understand you," said the Doctor.

"Och, divil a word I say but he knows."

He returned the bird to his breast as the two men stood up to go, and with a fine courtesy accompanied them to the door.

"Come again soon, Misther Maurice," he said, "an' the Doctor here'll be kindly welcome any time. 'Tis honoured my poor little place is with such visitors."

When they looked back, as they made their way down the mountain side, they saw him shading his eyes with his hand and gazing after them.

"I congratulate you, Doctor," said O'Hara, laughing. "You must have the four-leafed shamrock hidden somewhere about you. I never knew Murty to make friends so quickly before."

"I congratulate myself," said the Doctor, quietly. "He's a wonderful old fellow, and I wouldn't have missed seeing him for anything."

"He and his kind are the real scholars, Doctor, with the learning that never gets into books. They are so near to the heart of nature that they hear the

fine little earth-voices to which our more sophisticated ears are deaf. But, alas! they die with their learning locked up in them. How many a one like Murty—hedge-schoolmaster, pedlar, labourer, by accident, poet, scholar, artist by essential necessity—has died between the blank walls of workhouses, and the golden learning he has gleaned died with him! Why, for one like Murty to-day, there were fifty thirty years ago!”

“Yes,” acquiesced the Doctor, sadly, “we are going with a vengeance; we, and all that differentiated us, are being swallowed up by an alien people and an alien civilization.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ON COOLBAWN LAKE.

“O what are the winds and what are the waters?
Mine are your eyes!”

IN the afternoon, O'Hara took Biddy for the promised row on the lake.

The Doctor had had outing enough during the morning to satisfy him, and was now peaceably engaged in the morning-room among his beloved papers. The excellent Mrs. O'Hara had allotted this pleasant room with its outlook over Coolbawn Lake to be his during his visit, and had given instructions that, no matter how thickly the dust should gather, the Doctor's table was to be free of duster or feather-whisk while it held his papers.

Carrie had excused herself because of her Indian letter, so the young people set out alone.

It was an exquisite afternoon, with the waters of the

lake lapping about the pebbles of the landing-place, and creaming softly over the fine sand. There were a few clouds floating on the horizon, just enough to give deeper colour to the moist hills and the depths of the water. Biddy felt very blissful as O'Hara settled the cushions in the stern, and then swung her lightly over the little pools that had formed, cool and green, between the stones of the little beach.

"I can trust you with the steering, Miss Biddy, I suppose?" he said, handing her the tiller ropes.

"Yes, if you'll be lenient with me when I run you ashore, and don't say, as a young man from Oxford once said to me, when I had landed the boat in a bed of water-lilies and then pleaded that it went there of itself, 'The boat has absolutely no volition of its own.'"

"What did you say in reply to a speech so alarming?" asked the young man, pushing off and taking an appreciative side-glance at the rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes which accompanied the recital of this anecdote. Biddy always blushed when brought into the accidental prominence of making a speech longer than "Yes" or "No."

"Oh, I said, 'Hasn't it, though? That shows

how jolly little you know about boats.' He remained immovable, and I didn't know why every one laughed till I was told he was cox of his college boat. But how could I be expected to know? And, Mr. O'Hara, as for saying inanimate things don't do just what they like, why, look at bicycles and the tricks they play you when you're in the 'prentice stage."

"There's no doubt about it," said O'Hara, gravely. "And I think I may promise I won't repeat the Oxonian's speech, whatever happens. All the same, a bed of water-lilies is a ticklish spot to be landed into."

"Oh, I knew the deliberation of his speech covered real wrath. But there are no water-lilies here, fortunately. This looks very plain sailing."

"Not so plain as you may suppose, Miss Biddy. There are strange currents here, caused, it is supposed, by a subterranean communication with the sea. Over yonder, there where the cliff is inky black, the channel opens. The water passes through a cavern there, to use a very commonplace simile, as if it were poured from some gigantic pitcher in the hands of a giant."

"Really?" cried Biddy, with the wide eyes that might inspire a duller story-teller.

"Yes, the current flows so strongly that if you ventured near, your boat would be swept down like matchwood, and dashed to pieces against the walls and roof of the cave. I have gone as near as any one, I suppose, in this very boat, the *Fairy*, and I have snatched a fearful joy by being suspended from above, with a rope round my waist, to gaze into the roaring whirlpool. Further no one dare venture. The lake is supposed to empty itself in the face of the Doon Rock, a tremendous precipice over the Atlantic."

"How awful!" cried Biddy, looking with awe towards the black cliff-face, deep in shadows, which O'Hara had indicated.

"Coolbawn and I know each other well; but for an inexperienced person the lake is not so safe. I seldom put up a sail here, because there are squalls that drive suddenly through those gaps in the mountains, and whip the lake into foam and fury without a moment's notice. They are the proverbial storms in a teacup, for I have known the lake to hold the squall while the sunshine lies placid upon the hilltops, and all the world down here is a howling, green and grey mass.

"But I must not frighten you," he added, seeing

that his listener looked rather serious. "Even in the case of a squall we should be quite safe, I know the lake so well. Do you think I would bring you into danger?"

"Oh no," said the girl, a little fluttered because of a hint of passion in his last words. "I am quite sure you would not. But what is this?" with a little cry. "Is this one of your lake monsters?"

A great black head, with brown, beseeching eyes, had bobbed up alongside the boat, which was just getting beyond the rocks and shoals.

"'Tis Neptune, poor old boy. He always comes with me in the boat, but I couldn't find him when we were leaving. Wait, old fellow, till I can give you a chance of getting aboard without upsetting us. He may come in, Miss Biddy? Or will he spoil your frock? He's not an ordinary dog, or I shouldn't be unreasonable enough to suggest it."

"And I'm not an ordinary girl. I'd rather have a dog than most people any day. Besides, my frock is warranted not to spoil."

The young man was rowing towards a large flat slab of rock while the patient head swam by the gunwale. When they had reached the rock the

dog drew himself up on it out of the water. He was a great beast, black and shining, with a dash of white on his breast. O'Hara steadied the boat, holding it with an oar against the rock-side.

"Now, gently, gently, old fellow! Remember there's a lady in the boat. You shall see how cleverly he comes aboard, Miss Biddy. He's used to it. I believe if he found I'd gone without him he'd breast the Atlantic rollers to follow me."

The creature laid one great paw over the side, and then crept a little forward. It was admirable to see how he landed his fore-part in the middle of the boat before dragging in his great hind quarters. The boat rocked ever so slightly during the operation. When he was safely inside he looked up at his master for approval, in which Biddy enthusiastically joined.

"Now lie down, old fellow, and be introduced. You are to take care of this lady as you would of your master, while she is our guest—and afterwards, for the matter of that, whenever you have the opportunity. Give him your hand, Miss Biddy, and be prepared for a long inspection, for Nep doesn't give his friendship lightly."

The dog had, indeed, advanced his great paw for a handshake; and, as if he understood the full purport of what had been said, he fixed a gaze on Biddy's face as if he would read her through and through.

"That's right, old fellow," said his master. "Take a good long look at her, as you're going to be friends."

The dog, as if satisfied, breathed a deep sigh, and lay down in the bottom of the boat with his head on a fold of Biddy's skirt. •

"Now, Miss Biddy, he's adopted you," said O'Hara, "and it's once and for ever. Nep has few loves besides me in his heart, but he understood that I meant him to accept you too."

"You dear creature!" cried Biddy to the dog.

O'Hara smiled, and went on. "That sigh, Miss Biddy, spoke of a new sense of responsibility. He feels you're a woman, and so more dependent on his care and protection than a man would be. If by any accident we were to capsize in deep water now, Nep would strike out to shore with you. His heart and will might be in the direction of helping me; his sense of honour would bind him to you."

"Not really?" said Biddy, shy and radiant.

"Yes, really. Nep loves my mother and me. He tolerates all the rest of the world. But now he understands he is to love you too."

"I wish Carrie could have come with us as well," the girl said, after a silence during which she had been drawing the dog's silky ears through her fingers. She spoke quite sincerely, yet she was conscious of the sweetness there was in this afternoon's solitude of two.

"Yes; but she's happier writing to Annesley. I suppose you know all about that old love affair, Miss Biddy?"

"Yes, I know. I wish some one would leave Jim money, so that he could come home and they could be married."

"A hopeless love affair like that is rather sad for a girl, Miss Biddy."

"Ah, no, Carrie wouldn't say so, and I don't think so. The love is good, anyhow, though there must be always a great fear with it."

"Fear?"

"Yes, fear. There is always death, you know. And it would be so terrible if one's lover died while he was only a lover."

“Most girls would think the lover’s state most desirable.”

“Ah, they know nothing,” cried Biddy, clasping her hands in a fervour which for the moment blotted out his presence. “They are young; they have not really felt. I should be strong for all things if I were really all in all to the man I loved, if I bore his name, and had the right to take care of him. I should not feel then that death could take him from me. If I had the sorrow of being his widow, I should yet be prouder and gladder than the happiest wives on earth.”

“You are very old, Miss Biddy, and yet very young.”

She blushed hotly. “I have thought about things. I have led a lonely kind of life. Perhaps my thoughts are all wrong.”

He noticed her embarrassment, and took pity on it.

“Over yonder, Miss Biddy,” he said, “are some marble quarries, which are one of the sights of the neighbourhood. I am going to land you there, and to get you some milk at a little farmhouse I know. Now, do you think you’re capable of steering in that direction? Very gently, you know. Don’t chuck

the tiller. Just guide the boat as if she were a very soft-mouthed horse."

Biddy did her best to comply with these directions, and for a few moments they sped over the shining water gaily. They were getting into clear water now, though they were yet some distance from the shore. Below them lay gigantic rocks.

"Aren't they dangerous?" asked Biddy.

"The rocks? Oh no. They are very far below the surface of the water. The lake is very deep in parts. We shall be a little time landing, for the marble is no joke. The edges are sharp, and the surface gives no purchase. But Nep and I are used to the difficulties. You will see what a clever waterman he is now, Miss Biddy. I always say I'd rather have him than a man in the boat any day."

He was fastening a rope round the dog's neck as he spoke, and the boat was rocking quite close to the great marble slabs which hung above the water. O'Hara steadied the little craft with an oar as he would against the walls of a quay.

"I am always talking of having steps cut here, Miss Biddy," he said, "only no one approaches from the water side but Nep and myself, and we have,

perhaps, rather enjoyed the difficulties of getting ashore than otherwise. Now, old fellow ! ”

The dog climbed dexterously into the water, and then O'Hara pushed the boat off a little, paying out the rope slowly as he did so. The dog swam for a little cleft between the blocks of marble, and, after one or two failures, succeeded in clambering up the face of it. He drew the boat gently inshore as he went, and then, at his master's word of command, lay down as motionless as one of the marble blocks. They were in a little bay of the grey marble now, and the depths below them looked infinite.

“We could only essay this landing in calm weather,” said O'Hara. “If there were even a capful of wind, we should have had to row half a mile further up.”

Aided by the rope which hung down the face of the rock, he clambered up, and then proceeded to help out his companion.

“I shall have to swing you out, Miss Biddy. Stand right in the middle of the seat now, and spring when I lift you.”

He was steadying the boat by the bows while she crept cautiously nearer from the stern. He gave her

a hand to help her on to the seat, stooping towards her, and then, taking her under the arms, he lifted her. She sprang cleverly at the same time, and was landed well in on the great slab.

“Admirable!” said O’Hara, heartily. “You couldn’t have done it better. I am sure Nep thinks so too.”

The dog was looking towards them, thumping his great tail benevolently.

“I couldn’t have done it with Carrie, I believe,” he went on; “she’s too much of a town-bred girl. I was right when I gave you credit for strength and suppleness.”

“Oh, I could always catch on,” said Biddy, laughing,—“it’s a talent of mine; and stick on too. You should see me getting up on the barebacked horses, whether they like it or not, when I am in the country. I assure you their great sides and backs are not unlike the marble.”

They inspected the quarries and climbed to the farmhouse, where they were given tumblers of creamy milk by a rosy-cheeked young woman, who received Biddy’s thanks with a long speech in Irish, the graciousness of which was marked by flashing

teeth and smiling eyes. Money payment was out of the question, as O'Hara had already informed her, and though she longed to place a coin in the hand of the black-eyed baby she did not dare ; yet the place seemed very poor.

When they came back to the lake-edge, where the patient Nep lay as they had left him, a wind was ruffling the edges of the water, on which the boat rocked uneasily.

"There may be a little wind," said O'Hara, gazing thoughtfully towards the hills at the western end of the lake, whence these puffs were coming. "You're not nervous, Miss Biddy, are you ? Because, if you are, the least bit in the world, we'd better go home by land. We may be tossed about a bit."

"I'm not afraid," said the girl, calmly.

O'Hara helped her in without a word. The dog followed, and they pushed off.

"By Jove," the young man said to himself, "she's a well-plucked one ! Never even asked if there was danger !"

His admiration must have got into his gaze, for Biddy blushed, and then stooped to talk to the dog to cover her awkwardness.

The sky became greyer and the puffs of wind more frequent as they got out towards the centre of the lake. O'Hara rowed hard, and watched with cool grey eyes the point from which the wind was coming. The blue water turned muddy, and, as Biddy looked down on it, it seemed to rise up the sides of the boat and threaten to swamp them. The hills around the lake became black and threatening.

O'Hara looked away from the weather now and again to encourage her.

"Not frightened, Miss Biddy? That's right. I believe there's going to be some ugly weather, but we'll get in before it."

The girl smiled back at him bravely, and said nothing.

After a little they began to rise on the crest of the waves and sink till the water stood up about them. A swirl of grey water washed into the boat. Biddy only lifted her feet a little, out of its reach, and shook her skirt over which it had dashed. The dog lay beside her, watching her.

O'Hara rowed desperately hard, and now and again looked anxiously towards where the shore lay ;

but whenever his eyes met hers he smiled at her. She was not at all afraid; and the involuntary thought came to the young man of how handsome she was. Her bronze aureole, as is the way with naturally curling hair, only curled the more exuberantly because of the foam. Her eyes were bright and courageous, and she kept her place as steadily as Nep himself.

After a little, a silence fell between them. O'Hara was rowing too hard to be able to speak. She saw how his teeth were closed upon his nether lip; and the wind whistled more shrilly about their ears. She was getting very wet by this time, but she was only conscious of an exhilaration that made her pulses beat. Biddy had never been a coward; and there was an excitement in this adventure that put fear out of her heart.

At last they saw the low grey front of Coolbawn. As he had said, they had outrun the storm, which was now coming on in wild gusts and claps of wind, bringing a wall of hail and rain steadily down the lake. O'Hara got the boat up to the landing-place. He lifted the girl out with an unconscious tenderness.

"You good, plucky little woman!" he said.

"How shall I thank you? Any other woman would have put me in a horrible hole by swooning, or screaming, or something. Now run away, and get off this wet frock. Nep and I will manage the rest."

"I told you I wasn't of the fainting sort," she said, as she gathered up her wet skirts and ran lightly towards the house. As she reached the door she met her father and Mrs. O'Hara, both rather pale with apprehension.

"We're all right," she called out brightly. "We just escaped the storm, but we are a little damp."

O'Hara, when she was out of sight, looked at his hands. They were cut and bleeding from the strain of the oars. He held them towards the dog, who looked at him sympathetically.

"Hard work, old fellow!" he said; "and there was a time when you and I weren't at all easy in our minds—were we, old chap? We've been through worse together, but then we hadn't a lady on board. And such a lady! I can see you agree with your master, Nep! But my hands won't be in rowing trim for a few days to come."

CHAPTER IX.

QUEER COMPANY.

ON an afternoon when Biddy had declared for staying at home because of the great heat, she and her hostess and Carrie La Touche were in the shady drawing-room at Coolbawn, which looked out on the lake. There was scarcely any sound from outside except the lapping of the lake water, and the sleepy crooning of the wild doves, and within Carrie, looking shadowy in her white dress, was playing something dreamily sweet—it was a cradle song—at the piano.

Mrs. O'Hara, after an energetic morning, had nodded asleep over her knitting. The ladies were alone, for the Doctor had accompanied Maurice O'Hara to a distant horse fair, and they were not expected home till tea-time.

Biddy sat half in, half out, of one of the long

windows, with Nep's head on her knee, and her dreamy gaze fixed on the mountains across the water.

Suddenly around the corner of the house a rickety dogcart came in view. The horse was an unbroken farm colt, and his idea of progression was the making of awkward jumps forward and sideways, which must result, one would think, in the dislocation of the vehicle, if not the necks of the two persons it carried.

They were curious enough. The driver was a broad, red-faced person, wrapped in a white driving-coat with big horn buttons, fastened tightly about the knees with a horsecloth. Behind sat a little wizen-faced elderly woman, with a pretence at masculinity in her cut-away coat and soft hat. She clung on uncomfortably, and would, indeed, have had small chance of keeping her perch if she were not so very tiny.

As they came in sight of Biddy, the driver suddenly pulled up and flung the reins to the little woman, with a strident "Catch on, Merry, or he'll have you in Coolbawn Lake before you can say 'Jack Robinson,'"

Biddy had stood up in surprise, and waited. The driver of the shandradan was a woman, though an eccentric-looking specimen of her sex. As she clambered from her perch Biddy gazed in amazement at the short skirt, the stout boots, and the length of worsted stocking exposed to view below the driving-coat. The owner of these things was looking at her with eyes merry and shrewd.

"Think I'm an odd fish, hey?" she shouted, as she came forward with outstretched hand.

Biddy received the handshake mechanically, too much surprised to speak.

"I'm Lucy Holt," said the new-comer. "Did ye ever happen to hear of me?"

Biddy had—every one had—heard of this famous Amazon, who in Land League days had fought the League with a courage and ferocity unequalled by the most militant of landlords. Biddy had heard also a good many recitals of this famous dame's doings, the memory of which brought a half-smile to her lips now she was face to face with her.

"I see you've heard of me," said the visitor. "That young scamp O'Hara's been cramming ye

with stories of me. Did he tell ye my bark was worse than my bite?"

Biddy laughed outright under this catechism—for O'Hara had used the very phrase the night before in talking about his eccentric neighbour.


"Well, don't believe him, then, for when we were fighting, mind you, I showed them no mercy. We're good friends again now, but when they were unruly I put them across my knee and spanked them, till they cried for mercy. But who are you? I never saw you before."

"I'm Biddy O'Connor, from Dublin."

"Oh, indeed, an old friend?"

"Not very old," said Biddy, demurely. "My father, Dr. O'Connor, is interested in the same subjects as Mr. O'Hara, and they are very good friends."

"He'd better knock some sense into the lad's skull, then, for he's half a rebel, more's the pity, and maybe one of these days he'll be running his head against a stone wall. I'd be a rebel myself, maybe, if I wasn't afraid of the Papists. I'm Irish, too, but I'm afraid of the Pope of Rome, and would rather stomach John Bull. I say, Merry, where are



you getting to with the colt? Want to cool your heels in the lake, hey?"

Merry, holding on frantically, was indeed quite incapable of controlling the erratic movements of her steed, who was backing determinedly on the slope towards the water. Miss Holt, with a stride or two, seized the refractory colt by the head, and at the same time shouted lustily for Michael. The old manservant appeared at the door, and saluted the ladies with the respectful familiarity of an old acquaintance.

"For Heaven's sake, Michael," she called out, "send Larry, or one of the stable boys, or some one capable of holding this brute. He wants to drown Miss Merry."

Michael shuffled off, and in a few minutes Larry appeared, broadly grinning, to take Miss Holt's place at the horse's head.

"Come down now, you fool of a woman," she said, addressing her companion.

The little woman came down, squeaking a protest.

"'Tis the fool I am to be with you, Lucy Holt; for 'tis out of one danger into another you're always leading me."

"True for you, Merry, jewel. But you wouldn't be happy away from me, you know. This is my companion, Julia Merry, Miss O'Connor. Perhaps you've heard of her since you've heard of me. Don't misjudge her by her foolishness over that lump of a plough-horse. She's a plucky bit of a woman, and has stood by me in a good many situations, where a brave man might back out."

Biddy led the curious pair into the drawing-room, where Mrs. O'Hara still slept placidly, and the white-robed girl at the piano was singing one of her favourite songs in the green coolness.

"I will tell you when they parted :
When the autumn leaves were brown,
Then they parted, heavy-hearted.
The full rejoicing sun looked down
As full as in the days before,
Only they had lost a crown :
Only, for them, those days of yore
Could come back never more."

The eccentric Miss Holt came behind her, and kissed her heartily on the cheek.

"Well, my dear, you've come to the West after a too-long absence, and more like a white rose than ever. Hello, Cicely,"—as Mrs. O'Hara sat up

suddenly from her nap,—“so you do take forty winks of an afternoon, like less capable folk. Merry and I are famished for a cup of tea. We’ve been tramping the land since morning, and that colt of Cassidy’s is a buck-jumper, and worse on the constitution than a dose of sea-sickness. I’m ashamed to sit down in your nice room, Cicely; I’ve half the bog on my feet.”

“Oh, never mind, Lucy,” said Mrs. O’Hara, laughing. “If your tenants don’t object to your annexation of their property, I don’t. Miss O’Connor, dear, will you touch the bell? I want tea myself to waken me up. But where have you been tramping to this morning? I hope, now we’re all settled down, that you and Miss Merry are not going to plunge the country into strife again. You haven’t been serving any more notices to quit?”

“Divil a one! I’m the white-haired boy with them now. They think a sight more of me than they do of you and all the *coshering* landlords that made the times hard on us, poor divils, who wanted our own. I made a discovery at the last place I was at—M’Kenna’s, of the Valley Farm. Do you know that strapping lad of his that came home from


America a couple of years since in the thick of the trouble?"

"You mean Patrick? My son thinks highly of him. He's going to be married, I believe."

"The same. So he's a pet of O'Hara's. Well, I'm not surprised. Like seeks like. Yes, he is to be married to that little fair-haired slip of Kernahan's of the Grange. The old fool of a father wanted to divide the land. But I'm dead against it, as you know. I've a tidy little farm that old Byrne died out of last Michaelmas, and I'm going to let your friend Patrick have it at an easy rental."

"That's good of you, Lucy."

"It is, then. You'd think they'd faint when I made them the offer. They haven't quite got over thinking me Old Nick's daughter. Well, the odd thing is that I've had a queer kind of feeling that I'd seen Patrick somewhere or other. There was an uncommon familiarity about that square chin of his, and yet I couldn't place the fellow. But to-day, as they were standing staring at me, dumb with gratitude, I suppose, all of a sudden it flashed on me, and why it was that the chin stuck in my mind."



"Why?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, with interest.

"The very last time Merry and I were moonlighted, Patrick was the leader. I saw that fine chin of his below his mask by the light of the brushwood they were setting fire to at my hall door, thinking to burn me out, only Sergeant Saunders and his men came just in time."

"Oh, it couldn't have been Patrick!" said Mrs. O'Hara, shocked.

"Divil a one else!"

"Did you let him know you'd recognized him?"

"I did. 'Now you're going to be a married man, Patrick,' says I, 'you'll stay at home, my boy, and give up moonlighting. I'd hard work,' says I, 'to keep Merry from putting a charge into you that night that would have spoiled you entirely for Susie Kernahan.' She's a blood-thirsty little soul, is Merry."

"There now, Mrs. O'Hara!" protested Merry from the chair, where she sat like a grotesque child, her feet tucked under her on a rung, because they were too short to rest on the ground. "She's always putting the blame on me for everything, though she knows I only act under her orders."

"Oh, we all know what you are, Merry," said her commander. "They called me 'the Devil's Daughter;' but, if they did, they called you 'the Devil's Own.' We all know you're a spitfire."


"You won't do anything against Patrick now?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, anxiously.

"No. I believe in letting sleeping dogs lie. It makes me laugh, though, to think of their faces. They won't be easy in their minds, I'm thinking, till they get the new lease of Byrne's for a sign of forgiveness. I hear, by the way, that the Binghams are back at Castlecor."

"Oh, have they come? I had a letter from Eleanor from Paris, but she wasn't certain what day they'd arrive."

"Well, I hear they got down, bag and baggage, last night, late. Where's O'Hara, by the way? I'd have thought he'd have known the day and hour they'd get in."

Biddy, listening quietly, felt a sudden pang of apprehension. Who was this Eleanor Bingham, of whom she had never heard? And why should Maurice O'Hara be supposed to know specially about her coming?



"Eleanor didn't know herself," Mrs. O'Hara answered. "You see, it depends on Colonel Bingham, and he's so erratic. One never knows if he'll take a journey by easy stages, or post-haste it through."

"He's a bit of a hypochondriac, though a great friend of yours, Cicely. But you haven't told me where O'Hara is?"

"At Ballyfinmore. He has a lot of sheep in the fair, and he thought he'd pick up a little pony for my phaeton cheap. Zoe's only fit to be out at grass for the rest of her days."

"Well, it's time for me and Merry to be off. A great many thanks for your tea, Cicely. We were badly off to wet our whistles. I could scarcely get Merry past Sweeny's as we came through Ballymuck. She's a thirsty soul, is Merry."

"Don't believe her, Mrs. O'Hara, dear. I've been a Band of Hope for longer than I can remember," croaked the little woman.

"Well, come to see me, my dear," Miss Holt said, at parting, to Biddy. "And bring that father of yours. You'll be coming over, Caroline?"—to Miss La Touche.

"Oh yes, I'll come, Miss Lucy," said the girl. "We've been talking of coming every day."

"Look in to lunch, then. I'll give you a bit of bacon, and cabbage, and a chicken, if Merry here'll twist the neck of one for me."

"I wouldn't for worlds," piped Miss Merry.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. O'Hara, after her guests had departed, "you've seen one of our country characters, or rather a pair of them. She's a very strange person, is Lucy Holt, but for all her oddities, there's really something estimable about her."

"And lovable as well," chimed in her niece. "Though they talked of her in the newspapers as a sort of scourge of——"

"Satan, perhaps," said Biddy.

"She was harsh, violent, and overbearing," said Mrs. O'Hara. "But she's sound at heart, and I think the people recognize that, now the smoke of battle has cleared away."

"Papa would have liked greatly to meet her."

"And she him. I dare say he'd be surprised to find they'd much in common when they came to talk over things. Lucy Holt is possessed of a fund of common sense, and benevolence even, with which

few people would credit so redoubtable a character. You must take your father to see her. We'll fix a morning early next week for the excursion. But here come your father and Maurice! Well, Doctor, how did you like the fair? And did Maurice do any good there?"

"I sold the sheep for thirty shillings a head," answered her son for himself, "and Michael Geraty is leading home for you the sweetest little bit of a mountain pony I've seen for many a day. You'll be pleased with it, mother."

"I'm sure I shall, my boy. You're always good to me. I hope the Doctor saw some of the humours of the fair."

"He did, and thoroughly enjoyed them. We gave Tim Maher a lift on the road home. Tim had got rid of the mule, and was in great spirits over it."

"Who bought it?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, keenly interested, as usual, in the affairs of her poor neighbours.

"That's the joke of it. Tim spoiled the enemy. It was bought for the British Army, no less."

"But it is very old," objected Mrs. O'Hara.

"We watched the sale. You should have heard

Tim praise the mule. He said it was 'a thried and thrained transport mule, an' loved the red coat. He felt the crathur was in exile as long as it was out of sight of the Army.' Anyhow, he imposed on the two fine gaitered gentlemen, who were about as fit to buy a mule as I should be to select a lady's bonnet."

"I asked him, in confidence, as we were driving home," said the Doctor, "the mule's age. 'Well,' he said, 'Farrell Fox died the other day a very old man, an' when Farrell Fox's father was a young man he had that mule drawin' lime an' sand for him, and then no man knew his age.'"

"Weren't you shocked?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, though every one else laughed.

"Well, I asked him how he justified the statement about its being 'a thransport mule.' He answered, not a bit abashed, 'There's an ould ancient tradition that he sarved wid Bonyparty in Aigypht.'"

"Mules are things that never grow old," said Maurice, lightly. "But what have you been doing to pass the time?"

"We had Lucy Holt and Merry," said his mother.

"They were a revelation to Miss O'Connor. She invited you all to a lunch of bacon and cabbage next week. You must go, Dr. O'Connor. You won't meet a person like Lucy Holt every day. Oh, by the way,"—turning to her son,—“she tells me the Bingham's got home last night.”

“So soon?” said the young man, with lively interest. “Eleanor said about Saturday, she thought.”

“Well, they've arrived. You'd better take a note over for me in the morning, and try to induce the Colonel and Eleanor to come to dinner to-morrow evening.”

“All right,” assented O'Hara, cheerfully. “It's delightful news that she has come at last.”

Somehow Biddy began to feel an utter aversion for this Eleanor Bingham, who must have been in the life at Coolbawn, which she had begun to feel curiously sweet, long, long before she had come into it; who would be in it, probably, long after Biddy O'Connor had passed out of it for ever. She felt a dull ache of jealousy—a sense of estrangement from the place and the people, from O'Hara and his mother, and even Carrie, who had known Eleanor Bingham

long before she had made friends with lanky, long-legged, red-headed Biddy O'Connor.

The jealousy ached all the morning in her heart. It made her good-night kiss to her father more tender and lingering than usual. He noticed it, and held her at arm's length, to scrutinize her face wistfully. If he had only known, Biddy's eyes were moist because of the pathetic picture she had conjured up of herself as an old maid, friendless and loverless, and feeding her starved heart on an ideal of duty to her father. Poor Biddy! the comicality of that picture did not appear to her. When she went to bed that night she wet the pillow with the tears she had been keeping back all the evening.

CHAPTER X.

A RIFT IN THE LUTE.

“Alas! how easily things go wrong!”

THERE had been an indefinite arrangement between Biddy and O'Hara that, next morning, they should go to see his old nurse, at her lodge in the upper end of the glen. O'Hara had seemed to forget when he assented so readily to taking his mother's note to Eleanor Bingham; but Biddy had not forgotten.

She consoled herself before she slept with the reflection that he would surely remember the morning was hers by right, if the evening was for that other girl, who Biddy felt unreasonably sure was going to destroy the pleasure of the rest of her visit. He certainly had accepted with alacrity his mother's suggestion that he should take the note. Why *he*, when the place was full of barefooted retainers, swift as mountain ponies and with nothing

to do that Biddy could see but turn brown in the sun all day?

Would he go? Would he not go? Biddy debated the question with herself while she sat brushing out her hair before the glass.

Poor foolish Biddy set grave issues on that unimportant question as the yeas or the nays had it. If he went, then she would take it as a sign that the strange woman was preferred before her, and would at once set herself to dislike Maurice O'Hara as much as she possibly could. She did not yet quite know her own capacities in the matter of disliking him.

When she thought it probable O'Hara would go she turned angry for a moment. True, there had been nothing said between them that could bind his hours to her rather than to another woman, but there had been glances, inflections of the voice, sudden caressing movements, every one of which had thrilled her. Why, any moment, any hour, the words might be spoken! There had been dangerous pauses between them since that evening on the lake, impulses to speech which had been interrupted while the words trembled on the lips. The mere

words were nothing, Biddy said to herself, seeing that his eyes had said so much. He was surely hers, and no other woman's.

All the same, she put on her little armoury of defence next morning. She dressed herself in a frock she particularly affected, a cool muslin with a pattern of dead leaves on it, the colour of her hair. It left her neck bare and her beautiful small head to rise clear out of it like a flower on its stem.

She was so sure of her beauty that, as she glided into the breakfast room, she trembled and was suddenly shy. She was afraid to lift her eyes to her young host's face for fear of what she might read there. If she had looked she would have seen an expression at once ardent and humble, which would have given her the assurance she craved.

But when breakfast was over she went quietly out by herself to the garden, knowing that if he wanted her for that expedition he would seek her there. He had been called away to his study on business just as they concluded breakfast, and Biddy was determined that, if he did not remember their arrangement or chose to ignore it, she would not seem to remind him of it.

Nep had constituted himself her attendant since that evening of the boating, and was to be found waiting on the lawn for her whenever she came out-of-doors. He followed her to the garden now with grave manifestations of pleasure, and when she had seated herself in the summer-house facing the sundial and the great bush of peonies in bloom, he lay down beside her with an air of satisfaction.

She waited a quarter of an hour, half an hour, three quarters, before she heard O'Hara's step on the gravel. She sat quietly till he found her. She noticed, hardly lifting her eyes to him, that he was dressed for riding, and her heart turned suddenly cold towards him.

He sat down beside her in a lover-like way, and looked hard at her averted cheek.

"You won't mind waiting for our walk till a little later?" he said. "I am riding over to Castlecor, to our neighbours', the Binghams, with a note from my mother."

"Our walk?" said Biddy, with a fine affectation of forgetfulness. "I did not know there was any walk in view."

A shadow came over O'Hara's face. "I have

been remembering it every minute since we settled it," he said seriously.

"Why postpone it, then?" asked Biddy, crossly, forgetting that she had just a minute previously pleaded ignorance.

"My mother asked me to go," he replied, "and Miss Bingham would expect to hear from us at once."

"Then go, by all means."

He looked at her, puzzled by the icy coldness of her tone.

"I had hoped," he said humbly, "that you and she would be friends. I am sure you will understand when you have seen her. She is the most beautiful of women, and she has been good to me since I was a small boy. I could not offer any one a greater tribute than to wish that they should be friends of hers too."

"Pray don't let me keep you," said Biddy. "I shouldn't have cared to walk, in any case. It is too hot for walking—much too hot."

"I thought I could be back in a very little while, and our way would lie through the heart of the wood."

"Oh, I dare say we can have it some other time,"


said Biddy, carelessly, standing up. "I must go in now. I have an important letter to write."

O'Hara walked beside her, looking puzzled and grieved. The Biddy he had known hitherto had been different from this. It was not like her to be cold and capricious.

If he had known as much about women as about books he would have guessed that Biddy was jealous ; but he was too little of a coxcomb, and, he said to himself, the girl had given him no reason to think that she had any feeling other than one of frank liking for him.

He went off crestfallen on his ride. Halfway he remembered about Biddy's important letter, and the thought stung him like a whip that it was possibly a love letter. He wondered why he had not thought of it before. Was it likely, he asked himself, that Biddy should have gone loverless so far ? What a fool he had been to think she was saving up for him all those years since he had rescued her from the dragon of the world in Mrs. Blake's drawing-room !

The thought of that Biddy made him suddenly smile, and the smile had the effect of the sun coming out through a cloud.



The cloud had fallen again by the time he reached Castlecor; and though he cheered up at seeing Eleanor Bingham, there was enough of the shadow left for her to discover it. She had come quickly into the drawing-room, as soon as he was announced, with outstretched hands, and a welcome on her lips that was almost a cry. Her affection for Maurice O'Hara was something half maternal, half elder-sisterly.

She was beautiful enough to make poor Biddy's heart ache by-and-by. It was a spiritual beauty of exquisite lines, and extraordinarily pure colouring. She looked taller than she really was, by reason of her slenderness. Her eyes had that great charm, mystery. They were large and clear, with a steady light in them, and she had a habit of looking upward that gave her a rapt expression.

"And how are you, dear boy?" she said; "I was hoping you would come. I knew you would, as soon as you heard we were back."

"I am well, Eleanor; and you?"

"I am always well. We have had a delightful time abroad. Our Holy Week at Rome is something

the memory of which lasts a lifetime. Since, we have been taking it easy, dawdling up and down Italy. Florence, Verona, Milan—I have seen them all again. We have spent the hot days in churches and picture-galleries, cool, and full of shadows. We have come home slowly, but have not remained long anywhere on the way.”

“Colonel Bingham is well?”

“Yes, he has been well, except for a touch of ague at Lucerne. And you, Maurice—what have you been doing? What luck with the publishers?”

“My ‘Bards and Senachies’ will, I hope, soon be under way. We have a friend with us at present whom you must meet and like; no one could have been more helpful to me. He is a famous scholar—Dr. O’Connor, of Trinity. But so simple, so humble, so interested in the little work of others. By Jove, it makes a man feel small to know what he has done, and to see his humility!”

“I am glad. You needed such a friend; and I am so glad the book is getting on. It will make you many friends.”

“I ought to be satisfied, Eleanor, with your friendship and his.”

"I am only a poor woman, and no use at all to a young *savant*, only to wonder and admire."

"You are such a woman as Beatrice, or Vittoria Colonna, may have been. Do you remember the time I wanted to annex you, Eleanor, not knowing all that had happened? What a conceited young ass I must have been!"

"I told you it was not the real thing. It was your idealization of me. The real thing will be warmer and sweeter when it comes."

"You have made me rich enough with your friendship, Eleanor. God knows what it has been to me. If I am less unfit for the other love, and have a fairly decent heart and life to offer a woman in return for all a woman gives, it is greatly due to you."

"Hush!" she said, lifting a finger of rebuke. "It is due to God, and the gifts of heart and soul that He has given you. What could a poor woman do except pray for you, and I will always do that?"

"There is some one I want you to make friends with, Eleanor, at Coolbawn—Dr. O'Connor's daughter. She has led a rather lonely life, I fancy, and is too little like her kind to have many women friends.

She is quite young, not much more than a child, full of poetry and imagination, and very lovely, I think."

"Yes, Maurice?" she said, as if she expected something more; but he had apparently nothing more to say on that point.

"But I must give you my mother's note. She wants you and Colonel Bingham to dine with us this evening. I hope you will. My cousin Carrie is with us too."


"Yes, I think we can come. My father will like it, I've no doubt. And I shall be glad to meet your friends. Somehow I thought of Dr. O'Connor as a dried-up old bachelor, not as the father of a young girl. Poor young girls! I always feel sorry for them. They ask so much of life, and life has so little to give them."

"Ah, Eleanor!" the young man said in wistful sympathy.

"Yes," she went on, "I was like them once myself, before I knew that death could come into the world."

Her eyes looked far away for a minute. Then they came back to everyday life.

"Your friend will be happy, Maurice, if it depends on you," she said sweetly.



"It is too soon to talk of that, Eleanor. And, by the way, I must be going. I was to get back in time to take Miss O'Connor to see Nannie. I may say 'Yes' to my mother, then?"

"Yes, please, with my fond love."

But when Maurice got back to Coolbawn he found that Biddy had gone out driving with his mother.

He turned on his heel, and walked out of the library when Carrie La Touche had told him. He was angry, because he had made haste to come back when he might have spent the morning and part of the afternoon in such sympathetic company as that of Eleanor Bingham. He had a word between his teeth when he realized that Biddy had been implacable, and had ignored their arrangement, which would have grieved and shocked the fair saint he had left half an hour earlier.

He went round to the stables in a disagreeable mood, not at all common with him, and dropped down on various easy-going ways which he was usually content to pass over. He gave his retainers generally a rather bad quarter of an hour, and sent them in many directions grumbling and protesting.

"Musha, Mither Maurice," said Larry, at last,

"I dunno what's come over ye. You're disturbin' the bastes as well as ourselves. Them bastes is accustomed to a quiet life, an' they couldn't bear to be currycombed out of their seven sinses every day that was in it any more thin meself. Sure 'tis horses they are, not lookin'-glasses, like them throopers down at the barracks."

Meanwhile the perfidious Miss Biddy was having the reverse of a good time. She had snatched at her hostess's invitation to drive in a mood of bravado, and having accepted was rather alarmed about the consequences, and rather inclined to over-estimate the sweetness of what she had given up.

At any other time the drive by the lake shore and through the glens between furze and bracken would have been enchanting, but the walk in the woods, with unspoken love between two, and the demon of jealousy exorcized, as a word or a glance might have exorcized it, that were heaven itself.

She was lost in daydreams of what might have been, and was little conscious of her hostess's conversation, when suddenly she wakened to the fact that Mrs. O'Hara was talking of Eleanor Bingham.

"She has a disposition as beautiful as her face,"

she was saying; "and I hope you will be able to see for yourself this evening how beautiful that is. I dare say my boy has told you something of the friendship between them."

"No," answered Biddy, honestly; "I never even heard of her till yesterday."

"Indeed! I wonder at that," said Mrs. O'Hara. "He has been devoted to her since he was quite a little lad. There was some talk about an old love-affair of hers long ago. The man died. But she cannot grieve for him for ever. Of course, in any case she could not well leave her father, unless there were some one to take her place, which is unlikely."

She glanced consciously at Biddy, who was too absorbed to notice the half-shy expression on her charming matronly face.

"Her father is an invalid?" asked Biddy.

"Oh, not at all!" said Mrs. O'Hara, hastily. "He is a little faddish and a little particular, as most men are when they pass fifty. But he is really quite strong, except for an occasional ague fit—a reminiscence of his service days."

There was silence for a minute, and then Mrs.

O'Hara went on in a low tone of voice, as if she were talking to herself.

"Dear Eleanor is quite an heiress in her own right. Her mother was an O'Neill of Castle Finn. Wealth is uncommon enough in our part of the world to be worth mentioning. We are all as poor as church mice, alas! There, wait till you see Eleanor! You will understand how it is that she is Maurice's ideal woman of all women."

We none of us like paragons, and especially if the paragon happens to be held up to us by those whose undivided esteem we particularly desire; and the result of this conversation was, that Biddy showed to poor advantage that evening when Eleanor and her father came to dinner. If Biddy were feeling out of sorts, the life and light went out of her face, and left her dull and pale. Eleanor Bingham in vain sought to find the loveliness which Maurice had spoken of.

She tried to make friends with Biddy in the drawing-room after dinner, but Biddy, without meaning to be rude, was irresponsive. After a time, Eleanor, tired of her efforts, and feeling baffled and a good deal disappointed, left Biddy on her lonely perch,

and betook herself to Mrs. O'Hara's side, where she was so dearly welcome.

Poor Biddy felt that she was being left severely alone, and sat turning over the leaves of an album and trying to seem interested in Carrie's music. Presently Maurice came up from the dining-room, and, without a glance in her direction, passed to Eleanor's side.

Colonel Bingham sat down beside Biddy, and made formal conversation. She responded in a way she felt to be rather stupid, but a gleam of amusement came across her discomfort when she found, after a time, that the gallant warrior, while trying to talk to her, was really watching with an anxious eye her father's conversation with Mrs. O'Hara. Perhaps Biddy had a fellow feeling. Anyhow, she said very sedately—

"Please, Colonel Bingham, will you tell my father that I have a picture here I should like him to see?"

She could have laughed outright at the alacrity with which he performed her bidding. In a minute her father was by her side.

"Papa, dear," she said, looking up at him with

a glint of humour which it was a thousand pities Eleanor could not have seen, "have you ever experienced the painfulness of having to make conversation for an indifferent person while your heart was drawn as with cables to the side of another?"

The Doctor followed the direction of her eye in surprise. The Colonel was settling himself down with an air of the utmost relief in the chair he himself had lately vacated.

"Ah," said he, "is that how it is? Well, then, Biddy, he must have spent a bad quarter of an hour at your side, poor fellow!"

CHAPTER XI.

A LUNCHEON-PARTY.

FOR a few days Biddy and O'Hara had avoided each other as if by mutual consent. The O'Connors' visit to Coolbawn was drawing to a close, and this last week or so Dr. O'Connor and his young fellow-student seemed inseparable.

The hours O'Hara could spare from his many duties were spent with Dr. O'Connor, the two men being closeted together in the little booklined room which served O'Hara at once for study, office, smoke-room, and general den.

The book, the materials of which had been taken down from the lips of old men and women who spoke the Gaelic, and had withered or were withering off the earth faster than the ancient tongue itself, deeply fascinated the elder scholar. He had had to do with books always, and the work and thoughts

of dead men ; while here, for this young Connaught squire, had been waiting a great knowledge, ready to reveal itself to patience, sympathy, and love—a great book, a page of which was lost for every day in which there was none to transcribe it. In those long consultations over the materials O'Hara had gathered, and out of which the first of many volumes to be written was slowly shaping itself, Biddy was forgotten.

There was a morning when Biddy fulfilled her engagement to lunch with Miss Holt, she and Mrs. O'Hara and Carrie driving over in the little pony-carriage which the mistress of Coolbawn most affected for her own use.

At the last the Doctor and O'Hara had cried off. A long morning over the book was a pleasant prospect for both, and now that the Doctor's visit was nearly done, as much work as possible should be got into the remaining hours.

O'Hara helped the three ladies into the little carriage, arranging their rugs, and settling the reins for his mother with the careful kindness that belonged to him. But Biddy noticed the distant air with which he performed the little acts of politeness

towards herself, so different from his manner last week, and burned with a hot pain and desire to be away from Coolbawn and to hear no more of Maurice O'Hara.

He waved them cheerful good-byes as they drove away.

"My love to Miss Lucy," he said, "and I'm coming over to talk politics with her one day next week. Tell her Dr. O'Connor has gone so near to disaffecting me that I wouldn't run the risk of contaminating her with his rebelly opinions."

Miss Holt received this message at the door of her own domicile with an appreciative grin.

"Hear that now, the blackguard!" she said, with an enjoyment it was impossible not to share. "'Tis a shame for you, so 'it is, Cicely O'Hara, to have reared such a young scapegrace. You'll be having him in Kilmainham one of these days, if you don't look out."


She led the pony away herself, having delivered over her visitors to Miss Merry for a minute or two.

The establishment at Bera, as Miss Lucy's residence was called, consisted of herself and her

companion, and an old soldier, Andy Scully by name, who was maid-of-all-work, and was at that moment engaged in cooking the dinner.

The house, which had originally been of considerable pretensions, was for the greater part in ruins. They entered by the semi-classical, pillared portico, where the stucco, wept on by many rains, was peeling or had fallen off, and lay in great patches on what had once been garden beds. The hall smelt mouldily, and had evidently been long disused; the grate was rusty, and a few rags of tapestry flapped forlornly on the walls as the opening door let in the summer breeze. One side of the house showed nothing but shuttered windows. The other side was in fair order, and was occupied by the mistress of the house and her two dependants.

“My grandfather kept up great style at Bera, my dear,” Miss Lucy assured Biddy, who was staring about her with wonder in her eyes. “Why, the Lord Lieutenant of his day danced in the drawing-room, with the crowd of harpies and rapscallions that came in his train. ’Tis a fine room entirely for storing potatoes; and I’m sorry,



because they're all over the floor, that I can't ask you to walk in and look at the family portraits."

She had flung open the door as she spoke and Biddy caught a glimpse, in the twilight from the shuttered window, of a long white and gold room, with the sacks of potatoes standing in ranks.

"You'll be saying 'tis a shame for me to degrade the old house; but I'm the last of my name, a childless old maid without kith or kin. 'Twould take a fortune to restore the house, or I'd leave it to O'Hara. The rascally tenants have made ducks and drakes of my father's little provision for me, and anything I leave goes to Merry, who'll endow a Cats' Home with it, if she survives me. I wish I could see the old place razed to the ground before I go. 'Twill be like a melancholy old ghost on the face of the earth with the last Holt gone from it."

She led the way into a pleasant and light room, white-panelled like the drawing-room, and with a bow window looking down a steep descent to the river in its valley.

The room was evidently used for all purposes

except sleeping, for the dining-table was spread in the midst, and a couple of chairs were drawn near the smouldering turf fire. A very business-like tall desk and counting-house stool were in a corner, with a shelf of big account-books above. Over the fireplace were a couple of fowling-pieces, and some murderous-looking dirks and rapiers crossed each other, and formed stars on the wall.

A side-table was heaped with old newspapers; and a bookcase displayed through its glass doors a number of fat volumes—"Youatt on the Horse," "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Every Man his own Lawyer," "Clarissa Harlowe," "Rarey on Horse Taming," "Complete Cattle Doctor," "The Poultry Yard," "The Pig and its Disorders," and a Family Bible.

Biddy read the titles of these volumes, and then turned to meet Miss Lucy's quizzical glance.

"Not much of pure literature there, hey?" she said.

"My boy says," remarked Mrs. O'Hara, "that if you'd let 'Every Man his own Lawyer' alone and read your Bible you'd have an easier life in the long run."

"And give others an easier life; I'll go bail he added that."

Mrs. O'Hara laughed without repudiating the suggestion.

"I'm lawyer and doctor, ay, and minister in my own place, Miss O'Connor, and I keep a power of money from going into the pockets of quacks and pretenders. I have a few simple drugs by me, and some liniment and sticking-plaster. When they've ache or pain I give them senna tea, or castor oil. They have confidence in me, for though I force them to swallow it at the bayonet's point, so to speak, I always take a dose myself at the same time."

"We haven't all got your constitution, Lucy," said Mrs. O'Hara.

"You think we're a queer lot in this part of the country, eh, Miss Biddy?"

Biddy disclaimed such an idea weakly.

"Ah, but you haven't seen Clonoulty? Has she, Cicely?—Viscount Clonoulty, in the peerage of the United Kingdom. I met him coming from the fair of Athleague yesterday. He had the family chariot out, an old blue and yellow barouche on

green wheels. But 'tis the hen-house this many a day, and his lordship had forgotten entirely to tidy it after the fowl. But, sure, 'twas all equal, for he had a little pig under each arm, and there was a pretty little lump of a calf held down by his outstretched legs, let alone a couple of dozen fowl tied by the heels, and fluttering up and down about his lordship in a way positively distracting."

"How is poor Lady Clonoulty?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, calmly.

"Indeed, then, the poor woman's not up to much. What with the cooking, and the gardening, and the washing of the Castle, let alone tailoring all his lordship's breeks down to fit the little Clonoultys, I expect the poor woman often wishes she was once more Poll Cassidy, the hen-wife, and no Viscountess at all, at all."

"It's an absurd title," said Mrs. O'Hara.

"Clonoulty's proud of it. I'm told you'd hear it all over the place by nights, when he's kicking at the door of Murphy's shebeen in Ballymuck, himself and his friends, the police. They spend a sociable evening together most nights; and then, when the poteen's given out, they make for Murphy's. They

say 'tis a fine hearing with the peelers bawling 'Open in the name of the Queen!' and old Clonoulty, 'Open to Viscount Clonoulty!' Between them, the poor people of Ballymuck are often awake till day-break. The peelers are nice playboys."

"I don't wish to harm any one," said Mrs. O'Hara, "but poor Lady Clonoulty and her children would really be better off if that hopeless scamp of a man were taken."

"The very thing Thady Farrell said when he took a pot-shot at him in the League days. 'Sure, if you were gone,' said he, 'your misfortnit wife an' childer 'ud be lodged in the Queen's Palis.' All the same, I'd be sorry the old rapscallion was taken. He brews a nice drop of poteen in his own stable. I hear he supplies most of the magistrates, and the peelers are loud in its praise. 'Tis the poor man's little way of turning an honest penny, and I'm a customer of his myself. I like to encourage things that never paid the Queen's duty. But here come Merry and the chickens. You've been long enough superintending Andy and the fowl, Merry, to have reared them. But I can see by their spurs they're as old as Methuselah's cat."

"They're my own hatching," said Miss Merry, "and left the shell the last day of March."

The chickens made excellent eating, despite Miss Holt's unpromising introduction.

Biddy was too young, or perhaps was not sufficiently in love, to have her appetite utterly spoilt by the untoward events of the last few days. A more pretentious lunch would probably not have been half so good. The chickens were flanked by a piece of sweet home-made bacon, and accompanied by fresh, delicious peas from Miss Holt's own garden, or that corner of it which Andy was able to keep from being a wilderness. These, with some fresh fruit and a bottle of good old claret, made a meal good enough for any one. It was served, too, on handsome old china, albeit a little chipped and timeworn, and the thin silver had been polished to the last degree possible. The old soldier stood behind the chairs, straight as a ramrod, and handed the dishes, with a perfectly imperturbable face, even when his mistress's whimsical tongue was turned on himself.

"Andy never forgets himself," said his mistress. "I well remember his face the night the moon-

lighters were for burning us out, and the ammunition was gone, and reinforcements seemed as far off as ever. 'I regret to announce to you, madam,' said he, 'that I've fired the last cartridge; but, acting under my orders, Miss Merry has plenty of boiling water, which, with your permission, I'll pour from the upper windows on the enemy, while you ladies make a sortie.' Somehow I didn't like the idea of giving them scalded heads, though I didn't mind shooting them. But I was saved the necessity of deciding, as the police arrived in time."

"You must be glad those times are over," ventured Biddy.

"Well, they were stirring times," answered Miss Holt, with a note of regret in her voice. "I often drink to them in Clonoulty poteen, or in a drop of this claret—I haven't much more of it left, bad luck to it—that never paid dirty duty any more than the poteen."

"Smugglers' claret?" asked Mrs. O'Hara.

"Divil a lie in it, Cicely. My poor mother used to set a light in the upper window that you could see far out off-shore whenever the revenue men were on the watch. Many a smuggler with a shot in him

she nursed back to health and strength. There's a staircase and a passage, I believe, from the cellars below to the caves in the cliff, and if supplies went down one way, and silks and laces, tobacco and wine came up the other, who was the loser barring the Queen's taxes? I often wish the old days were back."

"You're more disaffected to law and order than any Fenian," said Mrs. O'Hara, laughing.

"Oh, now, I'm a sound Queen's woman. Only I never see the tax-collector but I'd like to drop him down the Devil's Chimney, as they say my forbears used to do with bum-bailiffs."

After lunch they walked through the overgrown gardens and orchards of Bera, and down a winding path to the river, where it widened on its way to the sea.

Miss Holt, who seemed to have taken an eccentric fancy to Biddy O'Connor, led the way with the young girl, and they presently were out of earshot of their companions. They were in a winding walk by the river-banks, and now and again a rabbit ran across the flecks of sunshine in the park.

Suddenly Miss Holt dropped her jovial voice to a

confidential tone, at the same time pressing Biddy's arm.

"My dear," she said, "you'll forgive a rough old woman for taking a bit of a liberty with you, won't you now?"

"Oh yes," said Biddy, lifting to her a pair of lovely eyes.

"Somehow I've got it into my blundering old head—I may be mistaken altogether—that there's a kindness between you and young O'Hara. Am I right?"

Biddy blushed hotly, which answered better than words could her shrewd interrogator; but she replied in a very chilly voice—

"Oh no, please, don't imagine such a thing. Mr. O'Hara and my father are friends; but as for me, I hardly know him."

"It isn't that anything has come between ye?"—anxiously. "You don't look as bright as the day we met."

"No, no. There was never anything between us, but acquaintanceship. Nothing, I assure you, to be interrupted."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite—quite sure."

Miss Lucy gave a deep sigh, which had a most incongruous effect coming from her.

"Well, my dear, you won't be offended anyhow. I took a fancy to you the first time I saw you, and I am as fond of Cicely O'Hara's boy as if he was my own. He's as good as gold, and the woman he makes his wife will be as happy as any woman can be in this world."

Her voice trembled as she went on.

"Don't go quarrelling with him. I want the boy to be happy; that's all. I love him like my own boy—my own boy. There, don't laugh, child. I don't look much like the mother of a handsome young fellow, with my short hair, and men's boots, and queer ways. No young fellow would look up to me as he would to Cicely O'Hara. But if I had ever won a love like hers, or had had a child like happier women, I might have been different."

Biddy listened with a vague ache of sympathy; there was such pain in the rough voice.

The story was so old that it had been forgotten, of the great friendship between Andrew O'Hara and Lucy Holt, then a handsome, strapping girl, with

ready wit and a generous heart. When he had gone mad over Cicely La Touche's beauty, and had wooed and married her in the first impetuous rush of his passion, the other woman had dropped quietly into the background of his life. But as years went by she had grown rough, mannish, and eccentric, and had withdrawn herself more and more from society and its usages, till the West country held up its hands in an amazed horror when her name was mentioned.

Immediately after this curious flash out of a lonely life Miss Lucy was engaged in laying her walking-stick across the back of a man whom, at the turn of the path, she had discovered in the act of snaring rabbits. She laid it on so lustily that the big fellow capered.

"Why, the devil take you for an omadhawn!" she said, when she left off, out of breath. "What the devil brought you into my plantations? You must be an ignoramus entirely, and a stranger in the country into the bargain, to come trapesin' over *my* plantations when there's a quiet, lazy man like Colonel Bingham has his rabbits running wild t'other side of the sunk fence."

CHAPTER XII.

SECOND SIGHT.

THE conversation with Miss Holt gave Biddy's somewhat drooping spirits a fillip. She had said to herself that day that what she had supposed to be O'Hara's special friendship for her was in all probability but ordinary kindness to his friend's daughter and his mother's guest. But if Miss Lucy's sharp eyes had detected a kindness, it was probably there.

She thought a good deal about it on the drive homeward, and, with a sudden swing of the pendulum, was ready to believe the misunderstanding all her fault. How ill-tempered she had been over his friend, and over the postponement of their walk that morning! With a sudden rush of repentance she determined to do what in her lay to set right the things which had been so persistently

going wrong. She blushed hotly to think how *gauche* and ungracious Miss Bingham must have thought her in her reception of those kindly advances. It flashed upon her that Maurice must have spoken of her to his friend, there had been such an evident intention of making friends with her, so evident a disappointment at the repulse.

The result of these meditations was that, when the carriage drew up at the door of Coolbawn and O'Hara came to help them out, Biddy's lately cold glance was replaced by one that plainly asked for forgiveness. It was as if some stranger had been masquerading in her place, and now the real Biddy had come back again.

She did not know how far he understood till he came to the drawing-room after dinner.

It was one of their quiet evenings. Carrie was at the piano, playing dreamily, and but half-conscious of an audience. She had settled her aunt beside a low table which held a lamp, and Mrs. O'Hara sat comfortably knitting, and, at the same time, reading an open novel on her knee. All the rest of the room was in shadow, and outside the open window the sky was coppery after the heat

of the day, and the earth smoked with vapour. Everything was silent, save when a distant dog barked or an owl hooted in the woods.

Biddy, from standing by the open window, had passed out on the verandah, and was leaning her head against one of the leaf-wreathed pillars.

She heard her father and O'Hara come into the drawing-room. She did not turn round, but she knew, as well as if she could see, that her father had seated himself near Mrs. O'Hara, and that the other was moving restlessly about the room. She heard her father ask for her, but did not catch Mrs. O'Hara's reply.

Presently some one came through the window, and to her side. She did not look round till Maurice O'Hara spoke.

"Oh, you are here, all alone! Are you well wrapped up, for the dews are heavy?"

As he spoke with anxious concern he touched her shoulder, and the girl blushed hotly; but it was too dark for him to see it.

"Oh yes, I have Carrie's shawl. I am perfectly warm."

"But you have nothing on your head, and the

dews are heavy as rain. Wait, I will fetch you something from the hall."

He entered the hall by way of the verandah, and brought her one of his own deerstalker caps. She would have taken it from him, but he prevented her imperiously. As he put it on he touched her hair lightly.

"Good heavens, child," he said, "it is quite damp! You will get your death of cold."

"Not I!" she said. "But if it will set your mind at rest, I will run upstairs and rub it dry."

"Yes—do, please."

She passed him with a half-laughing disclaimer of any necessity, and came back to the drawing-room in a few minutes with her eyes very bright and her unmanageable hair more than ever standing out about her head.

For the rest of the evening she was very demure, and even volunteered to take a hand at whist with her father and Mrs. O'Hara. Maurice made the fourth, and they were partners, but he didn't seem in the least vexed when she returned her opponent's lead, and led trumps herself in a fit of absent-mindedness.

When the game was over and the elders had gone back to their talk, Biddy made the little speech upon which her mind had been running for the last hour or so.

"Do you remember," she asked sedately, "that you promised to take me to see your old nurse?"

"Yes. We arranged it all, but you wouldn't wait for me. You went out instead to drive with my mother." He spoke with tender accusation.

Biddy lowered her eyelids till you could see nothing but the upward-curling lashes on the round cheeks.

"I was under the impression that it was you who broke the engagement."

"I did not break it," he said with conviction. "You were very unkind, Biddy; but you are not going to be unkind any more?"

He had called her by her name unconsciously, and she was far from being offended.

Her dreams were blissful ones that night. In two days more they must return to Dublin, but there was to-morrow; and after that, said Biddy,—

"No matter if I go mad,
I shall have had my day."

Biddy's imaginations were indeed all of the near future. Of what might lie beyond she did not think. It was enough that the wall of coldness which had been coming between her and her friend was breached ; that they were to walk through the woods to-morrow, and have each other for companion for a blessed three hours or so. It was enough that her childish hero was again hers, and to remember his tenderness, and the vibration in his voice when he spoke to her, and the ardour of his eyes, and the triumphant ownership of his manner. Biddy felt a true woman's delight in the man's air of possession.

What lay beyond to-morrow, hidden by golden mists, she was too satisfied to ask. In the first love-dreams of a very young girl she does not think of marriage, nor of anything but love.


The morning was cloudy, with bursts of brilliant sunshine. After breakfast they set out for their walk, with no pretence of asking the company of the others. The morning woods were delightfully fresh, with the dews yet grey on the bracken where the sun had not penetrated, and all the leaves of the trees rustling and quivering. The first songs of the birds were over, but now and again one sang out of his married

happiness; and squirrels squatted in the boughs to watch the human folk go by; or they saw the white scut of a rabbit as he hurried into his hole in the undergrowth. The woods were full of scent and sound, of colour and movement.

They walked briskly, both full of the joy of life and youth. This morning their mental atmosphere was less electrical, less charged with passionate feeling, than last night, as the morning is cooler than the night. They were friends again in the bright undisturbed friendship of old, and their talk was as gay and unconscious as the talk of two schoolboys.

There were stiles to be climbed over, and here and there bits of boggy ground to be carefully skirted. O'Hara was kind and helpful in those difficult places; but so simple was his manner, that the most acute observer could suspect nothing more than a cordial friendship between the two.

Their talk was on common things. The latter half of the way, O'Hara talked with quiet feeling of his good old nurse, of her devotion to him, and the great sorrow she had borne so patiently: and Biddy listened with sympathetic interest, till they



came in sight of the little cottage at the end of a long winding avenue of beech and elm.

The door stood open when they reached it, and the brilliant sun, which was now fitfully shining, streamed full on the face of its one occupant. This was an old woman, white-haired and brown-skinned, whose little figure had the strange air of patience which belongs to the blind. She wore a white frilled cap tied under her chin, and a little scarlet shawl about the shoulders of her neat print gown. She was knitting a stocking as she sat in the big chair woven out of straw, and had evidently heard their footsteps from far off.

"God save all here!" said Maurice, entering.

"God save you kindly, my son!" responded the blind woman. "Sure, I knew 'twould be you, Misther Maurice, for I've dreamed of you three nights runnin'; an' now my dream's out."

O'Hara stooped and kissed the withered cheek, and having set a chair for Biddy, drew his own close to his old nurse. She put up her hand and patted his cheek, and then kept softly stroking his hand, which lay on the arm of her chair. He took the stocking from her, and looked at it.

"Is it another stocking for me, Nannie?" he asked.

"For who else, achora?"

"Why, Nannie, you must think I wear out my stockings quickly! How many pairs does this make this year?"

"Never mind, asthoreen; I sit here in the sun and warm my old bones, an' as I reel off the stockins I do be thinkin' they'll keep the child o' my bosom warm, an' so I don't feel lonely. But who came in the door with you?"

"A great friend, Nannie—a young lady. She wanted to know my dear old nurse."

"God bless her! Let her come and sit by me, that's my boy's friend."

Biddy came near, and took the extended hand. The old woman reached up and felt her face. She passed her fingers over the girl's brow and hair.

"A face like velvet," she said, "an' soft purty hair like the bog-cotton. I'll have two faces now to think over in my darkness."

"Is the darkness lonely?" asked Biddy, hastily.

"No, then, I like bein' alone, unless it's my beautiful boy or herself drops down from the house.

I do be moidhered wid Kitty Murphy, the poor woman. Misther Maurice 'll make me have her o' mornin's to set the house straight, an' chop a bit of wood, an' fetch the water."

"You're not reconciled to having things done for you yet?" said O'Hara, shaking his head at her as though she could see him.

"No, then, sure, I'm the ungrateful ould fool. But I do be thinkin', many a time, I could do without her; for the tongue of her runs like the clapper of a bell: and I don't be needin' her, for it would surprise you how clever a dark woman comes to be in the inds of her fingers an' the tips of her ears. She thinks, the crathur, that I'll be better for hearin' the little bits o' talk; an' I don't deny that a weddin' or a christenin' or a funeral is news to me yet: but she has no discreditation in the mind of her, an' 'tis only foolishness to be talkin' o' the neighbours. I do think I'll never get the woman out o' the house, o' mornin's; yet she'd be for runnin' in every other minute of the day, if I'd have her. 'Tis kindness of her, the crathur, but sure, she doesn't understand."

"Yet, Nannie's no hater of her kind," said O'Hara, by way of explanation. "To hear her, you wouldn't

believe she was the confidante and adviser of half the village."

"It's true for you," said Nannie, well pleased. "The little girls do be comin' to me with their bits o' troubles, God help them. They're heartbroken if they can't get what they want the minute they want it, though I do be tellin' them sometimes that it's thankin' God they'll be yet that He hardened His heart against their prayers. An' the married women the same way. It takes great grace to lead the married life. Sometimes 'tis the woman's fault, an' I tell her so. 'Sure 'twas no way to be tratin' the man at all,' I says, 'to go flitterin' an' screechin' like an ould hin the minute he come in. You couldn't expect a sober man, much less wan wid the dhrink taken, to have patience wid you.' If they takes my plain spakin' well, I know there's hopes for them; but if they flounces off offended, I pity the poor man that has foolishness waitin' for him by his fireside. Yet the women have a lot to bear. I do be thinkin' often that God must be sorry He didn't make them harder."

"What do you think of when you sit here in the sun alone?" asked Biddy.

"Of many a thing. Sometimes of them that's gone. I do often think of my man, an' of the poor boy that followed him by way of the say, till I get light-headed, an' could believe they wor in the room with me. But, sure there, they aren't likely to leave the spot they're in. A minute away from heaven would be like thousands o' years; an', as for consolin' me, sure to them, it isn't a second o' time since we parted; an' if you were going away for half an hour it isn't runnin' back you would be in the middle of it to say not to be impatient. Doesn't that stand to raison, Misther Maurice?"

"It does, Nannie. But to return to earthly matters, I see a big patch of damp on your wall. When did that appear?"

"See there, now?" said the blind woman, turning her sightless eyes about. "'Tis to the right o' the chest of drawers, isn't it? I don't know when it came, but I've been findin' my bits o' things damp the last few weeks."

"I'll have it seen to at once, Nannie. The thatch must be broken; I'd better have a look at it."

To Biddy's surprise, as soon as Maurice had left

the house, the old woman leant towards her, and caught both her hands confidentially.

"My dear," she said, "I wanted to be wid you alone. I knew the minute you brightened the door, where another 'ud cast a shadow, that you were the lady my boy has his heart in."

Biddy would have protested, but the old woman silenced her.

"Maybe he's not spoken yet; but sure I know, jewel, I know. There's a strame of love flows betune us, because we both love him. Sure he couldn't be sick nor sad nor sorry but I'd know, an' I don't think things has been going well betune ye lately. Have they now, achora?"

"No," said Biddy, half unwillingly.

"See that now. But they will?" coaxingly. "You'll make them all right? Sure young blood is foolish, but take my word for it, my dear, that there's nothin' in the world that's worth a pain to a heart that loves you. You'll know that one day, achora. You'll make up the little quarreleen betune yez, won't you now, darlin'?"

"We have made it up," said Biddy, simply.

"Thank God. I thought he came in with the

light tread my heart sings to hear. Ah, my dear, he's loved you long and well. Sure he was only a bit of a boy whin I first knew the love trouble was on him. He's a man now, and says nothin', but I know his heart's been travellin' wid you this while back. Don't thry him much longer, will you, jewel? he's waited for you so long."

"No," said Biddy, half inarticulately, for she was beginning to fear what was coming.

"That's right, Miss Eleanor, love. I could die easy if I knew he had his happiness, and that the ould nursery'd have a little cradle again. I'd like to have his little child in my arms before I die."

She stopped abruptly as her foster-son came in, folding his foot-rule.

"It's the thatch, Nannie," he said. "Full six feet of it has fallen in. I'll send Shepherd on Monday to thatch the whole house. It's no use making two bites at a cherry. And now" (to Biddy) "we'd better be getting off; it looks like a change in the weather, and we're unprovided for it."

The old woman bade them an affectionate farewell, and little guessing at the trouble she had so

innocently created, gave them a fervent blessing as they left her door.

A cloud had indeed shadowed the sun, and a cold wind had risen that drove great banks of silvery cloud before it, and piled them in serried masses. O'Hara had his eye on the weather, and did not observe his companion's silence. Her thin muslin frock and little sunshade were poor protection against the rain which seemed likely to come, and they had brought no umbrellas. O'Hara inwardly fumed over his carelessness as the wind grew colder and the sky darker.

"My child," he said, after a minute's contemplation of the point of the wind, "there's a heavy rain coming down from Slievenamuck, but we may outrun it if we are very quick. I shall never forgive myself if you get a drenching. Come, let us run for it."

Biddy put her cold hand into his, and started running down the long avenue of the wood. Her pace was always a good one, but she ran with no buoyancy now.

Her head ached as she tried to realize all that had come to her knowledge concerning the man beside her, whose secret she had discovered. This morning

she would have run like Atalanta and laughed aloud for the mere joy of running. Now she ran silently though swiftly, pausing now and again for a breath.

Presently they reached the narrow wood-path, where it was not possible for them to keep up the headlong race. There the storm burst upon them. At first they heard it pattering on the roof of the wood overhead. It came faster and faster, and began to reach them where they were under an apparently impenetrable roof of chestnut leaves. The wind crept down the aisles of the wood, and brought little freshets of rain with it which soon reduced Biddy's frock to a limp rag, and beat miserably about her ankles and her feet in their light shoes.

"There is no use staying here," said O'Hara with conviction. "I'll have to get you home as soon as possible, and out of those wet things. Let me see what kind of shoes you have on your feet."

Biddy held out one foot for an answer.

"You poor little thing!" with such genuine commiseration that Biddy felt as if she could cry for herself, she was so profoundly wretched. "You must have my coat, at all events. It will keep your shoulders dry."

He pulled off his coat and wrapped her in it, despite her protestations.

"Nonsense, child," he said, rather irritably. "I come in from the lake every day as wet as Nep. I shan't take cold, and pray Heaven that you mayn't."

So concerned was he about the rain, that he did not notice how the bright Biddy of the morning had clouded over like the bright sky.

"I should like to take you in my arms and carry you home," he said. "I dare say I could manage it."

He looked at her so seriously that Biddy cried out in evident distress. O'Hara laughed.

"Never mind, child," he said. "It wouldn't be any good, for you're thoroughly wet by this time. You'd better keep as warm as you can by walking, and I dare say a hot bath and a change will make you all right."

They arrived thoroughly drenched, and just as O'Hara was shaking himself like a water-dog at the door of Coolbawn the sun came out.

Biddy crept upstairs, conscious through her aching unhappiness of looking her very worst.

She avoided O'Hara that evening, keeping close to

the chimney-corner, where the fire, which is seldom unwelcome on Irish summer evenings, burned merrily. She had a novel in her hand, and when her young host came to her side once or twice, she devoted herself to it so assiduously that he turned away at last with a sense of injury.

“She is a capricious Biddy,” he said to himself. “I wonder how long it would be before I should get tired of her hot-and-cold treatment! It seems to me,” he thought, with true masculine stupidity, “almost as if she can’t forgive me for getting her finery spoilt this morning.”

CHAPTER XIII.

CONFIDENCES.

BIDDY woke the next morning with the added misery of a well-developed cold in the head. It was their last day at Coolbawn, and they were to lunch with the Bingham. The latter prospect Biddy shrank from with horror, as she surveyed in the glass her heavy eyes and dull complexion. Mentally she compared the picture with that of Eleanor Bingham, white as a lily and as sweet, and concluded that she could not endure the juxtaposition. She sent word, by the maid who brought her early cup of tea, to Mrs. O'Hara to say that she had taken cold, and would like to rest during the morning if she might.

The kind-hearted hostess was by her bed in a very little while, and full of pity for her.

"You must keep house to-day," she said, "and I'll dose you with camphor. I'll tell you what we'll

do. We'll let the others do the luncheon-party for us, and you and I'll stay at home. You mustn't come down till the house is clear, and then we'll take it easy by the morning-room fire, and have our lunch served there. The treatment will soon drive off this horrid cold."

"But they will be disappointed at not seeing you?"

"Never mind, my dear. We see Eleanor and her father almost every day, when they are at Castlecor. Besides, I'll ask Maurice to induce them to come back to dinner."

She looked slightly conscious, as Biddy had seen her look before when the Binghams were under discussion.

"But you mustn't think of leaving to-morrow, my poor child, with this cold upon you. I must tell your father that you have agreed to stay a few days longer."

"Please don't"—with such obvious alarm that her hostess felt rather hurt. "I assure you the cold will be quite gone by morning, and it would upset all our plans to stay. You know we have our berths taken in a steamer that sails for Christiania

on Saturday. Indeed, indeed, it is no use speaking to him, and it would only make him uneasy about me."

"Very well, my dear," said Mrs. O'Hara, a shade coldly.

But she forgot the repulse to her hospitality by the time she and Biddy were installed by the morning-room fire.

As soon as Biddy heard the dog-cart with its three occupants drive away, she got up and dressed herself, with a throbbing head, and a heart that ached with a dull memory of yesterday's revelations. She felt it intolerable that she had to stay here till to-morrow, and that she must meet Eleanor Bingham again. She said angrily in her heart that, considering the lover-like way O'Hara had behaved to herself, he might have waited till she was gone before displaying his love for another woman. But Biddy's anger was only momentary; she was too stupid and depressed to feel angry for long.

It was comfortable in the morning-room, where Mrs. O'Hara put her on a chintz-covered sofa by the fire, with soft cushions under her aching head. She had confessed to a bad headache, and Mrs.

O'Hara fetched her eau de Cologne bottle and bathed the throbbing brows. Under her gentle treatment Biddy declared, after a while, that she was much better, and lay watching the elder woman's shining needles and the occasional flash of the diamonds in her old keeper ring as she knitted busily.

"You are as indefatigable a knitter as old Nannie," she said at last.

"Yes, my dear. I learnt a good many of my stitches from Nannie. She makes all Maurice's stockings, so she leaves me nothing to do for him; but with the little ones in the cottages about us, and the chilly old people, there are plenty of ways of disposing of my knitting."

"You make a good Lady Bountiful, Mrs. O'Hara."

"Not I, child. I do what I can for them, poor things, but it isn't much. We have so little money. Maurice's forbears were very open-handed, or, rather, very improvident. We were heavily in debt, but my boy has pretty well freed us from that. However, we are poor still. There have been so many bad years; and my boy will not press the people."

"It is hard to want money," said Biddy, simply.

Mrs. O'Hara looked across at her. It was an hour for confidences, and she liked Biddy O'Connor, and found her sympathetic. Yes, she thought she might speak of things that lay near her heart.

"It is very hard, my dear, and Maurice needs money for such good purposes, not to waste it nor to hoard it, but to carry out all manner of useful things. By the way, have you noticed his attachment to Eleanor Bingham?"

"Yes."

"Well, if they marry I shall have my heart's desire, and my boy, I believe, will have his. She was his first love, and I think the feeling has grown with his manhood. Maurice is very silent about such matters. I think he would speak first of his love to the woman who had won it. She is very beautiful, is she not?"

"Very beautiful," assented Biddy, without enthusiasm.

"I hope now they will settle matters. The Bingham's have been so much abroad lately that there have not been many opportunities. Eleanor is so good, I should be quite satisfied to see my boy's life in her hands."

"You are more ungrudging about your son than most mothers."

"I wouldn't grudge him nor anything else to Eleanor. She would be everything good for him and for our people."

"You are good to the people. She could not be better than you."

Mrs. O'Hara looked pleased, and then gazed into the fire with a half-shy smile.

"I am getting an old woman, my dear, and, if necessary, I would step out and make way for my son's wife. I should be quite happy nursing the babies. I love little babies. I had only one child myself; but ever since, I have desired to see a baby in Maurice's old nursery. My longing is not for children, but for little babies—little helpless milky things, dependent on one for everything."

Biddy felt a curious unreasoning anger at this speech. She turned her head restlessly, and clenched her hands a moment, as if she suffered pain.

"You are too near the fire, I'm afraid, my dear," said Mrs. O'Hara. "Wait; I will get you a screen."


If we want to roast you out of a cold we mustn't roast you into a fever."

She fetched a hand-screen, and Biddy took it gratefully. She was glad to have it between her and Mrs. O'Hara's confidences.

"It is almost necessary," the lady went on, "that Maurice should marry money. Not that I would have my dear boy marry *for* money; but where money is united to everything else desirable, as in Eleanor's case, it seems providential. And as for myself, I would not cast the slightest shadow in the way of their happiness. I should know how to efface myself absolutely. As is only right, the old should give way to the young."

"Old!" repeated Biddy, indignantly. "You are not old. You are quite young, except that you have a grown-up son. And you are nearly as beautiful as she is."

"My dear!" said Mrs. O'Hara, deprecatingly, yet blushing with pleasure. "That is nonsense. Of course I was married very young—girls married younger in my time—and I was not twenty when Maurice was born. But I am not to be compared to a beautiful girl."



"Many people would admire you more. I think she is too cold."

"Well, my dear, it is only the truth to say that some people do admire me. Now, you mustn't think me a very foolish old woman. I am sure"—with a sigh—"that we women must be very old before we grow indifferent to admiration. I don't know why I talk to you of these things. You are the only person to whom I have ever done so. But I may say that since my dear husband's death I have had several offers of marriage—one indeed, renewed from year to year, and with as much ardour as would satisfy any young girl. But I have always said that I don't approve of second marriages."

Biddy noticed something wistful in the manner of this speech.

"It depends, I should think," she said, "on how one felt towards one's first husband. If one had given him everything that one was capable of giving, then all that part of one must lie in the grave with him. But if one had kept back some love and faith and trust, it is only natural that they should be given to some one else some day."

"You think so," said Mrs. O'Hara, irresolutely.

"Yet I have said over and over again that I did not approve of second marriages."

This conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Michael with the luncheon tray, and was not resumed on the same lines.

After lunch Biddy accepted Mrs. O'Hara's recommendation to take a little sleep, and, having cried quietly behind her hand-screen, fell asleep with the tears yet on her eyelashes. Mrs. O'Hara had gone off to her own room to write letters, and the only other occupant of the morning-room was Nep, who was now Biddy's constant attendant.

The afternoon wore on and she still slept, for she had had a bad night. She was sleeping when O'Hara came in, and, having failed to find his mother in the drawing-room, looked for her in the morning-room. The screen partly hid Biddy's cheek, and her eyes were in a shadow. She was sleeping as sweetly as a child, and her hands, like a child's in sleep, had the fingers softly curled towards the palms. O'Hara's first impulse was to steal away, but as she did not stir he stood a moment watching her.

“Poor little darling!” he said to himself. “How soft and young she looks! I should like to take her up in my arms now, and kiss her, and make her my own for ever. She does not look now as if she could try a man with caprice and coldness, as she has been trying me lately.”

He felt a cold nose against his hand, and looked down.

“Ah, Nep, old fellow, have you been keeping guard? All right, old dog; we needn’t wake our mistress, need we, by making a fuss? We know very well, you and I, how glad we are to see each other.”

He bent down and put his lips to one of Biddy’s frills, and then stole softly out of the room, while the dog, after following him with a long yearning gaze, returned to the hearthrug.

Biddy did not wake up till dinner time, and, when she did, she felt better. However, Mrs. O’Hara insisted on sending her dinner to her in the morning-room, instead of bringing her to the cool dining-room, where the shaded candles burned in the twilight and the moths came in through the open windows.

"We must keep the dear child in a warm temperature for to-day," she said to Dr. O'Connor, "so that she'll be all right for travelling to-morrow. She insists on going to-morrow, though I implored her to stay."

"Oh, does she?" said Dr. O'Connor, with some bewilderment. "I should have thought that she would have liked to stay on a day or two; but, you know, we are going to finish my holiday by a cruise, and I suppose Biddy requires a little time to get ready. Ladies always have so many things to see to."

"We are rather unaccountable, as a sex. Isn't that so, Colonel Bingham?" the lady remarked, with a touch of coquetry, turning to her neighbour.

Colonel Bingham said something in a low voice which Dr. O'Connor did not catch; but Mrs. O'Hara looked as pleased as a young girl at a pretty speech.

Eleanor's father was a handsome man about fifty years of age. He had seen a good deal of service in India, and was much sunburnt. He was irritable often, having brought from India a touch of liver complaint, and he was very particular about his

food ; but with Mrs. O'Hara he was never irritable. When he was inclined to be restive, as he sometimes was, even at her dinner-table, he seemed to grow gentle all at once when she turned her calm beneficent smile upon him.

People said he had been in love with Mrs. O'Hara even before she was a widow, and that, returning after each one of his long absences, his first question had been, " Well, Cicely, are you going to reward me at last ? " If so, the answer had been always in the negative ; and now the Colonel's head was full of grey hairs, and Mrs. O'Hara was beginning to show crow's-feet about her beautiful eyes. The busybodies had long thought it would be an ideal arrangement for Mrs. O'Hara and Miss Bingham to change places and names.

After dinner, when the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, Mrs. O'Hara thought of her invalid guest.

" I must go and see how my little charge is getting on," she said.

" Let me go," said Eleanor. " I should like to make friends with her, and this is my last chance."

She said it so earnestly that Mrs. O'Hara was surprised ; but she assented heartily.

"Yes, go, my dear. She'll be cheered up by a little chat with you. Try and persuade her, even yet, to stay over to-morrow."

So it came that Biddy, looking round on hearing the door open, saw Eleanor Bingham, more beautiful than ever in her puritanical dress of white silk made high to the throat.

"May I come and sit by you, Miss O'Connor?" she said, in her silvery voice. "I am so sorry to hear of your cold, and should be glad to know that it is much better."

"It is nothing at all of a cold," said Biddy, hoarsely; "and it will be quite gone to-morrow."

"Ah, don't be too sure of that!" said Eleanor, settling herself in a low chair, and unfurling her fan of peacock feathers. "These colds often cling nastily, especially in summer, when one is perpetually in draughts. Is it true that you are going to-morrow?"

"Yes, we must go to-morrow."

"Have you irrevocably made up your mind? Couldn't you stay till Tuesday? We are all uneasy

at your going before getting rid of your cold. I know Maurice feels so uncomfortable about you. He blames himself for your wetting."

"She talks already as if she had a right to speak for him," thought Biddy, taking refuge in an ungracious silence.

"I had hoped very much to have seen something of you, Miss O'Connor. I wished to make a little picnic party for you to our favourite waterfall. I was very sorry to have come home only when your visit to the West was nearly at an end."

"Why should you be sorry?" asked Biddy, bluntly.

"Oh," Eleanor said, with a nervous laugh, "because I should like to be friends with you."

"You are very kind."

There was an awkward silence for quite three minutes. Then Eleanor bent down and caressed Nep. What a blessing dogs are, to be sure, when conversation is a trifle difficult!

"I notice Nep is devoted to you, Miss O'Connor. How do you manage it? See, he will not even wag his tail for me! And look at his air of absolute indifference! I think it rather rude."

"Dogs always like me," answered Biddy; and then, in a constrained voice: "I wonder his master doesn't make him like you."

Eleanor looked at her, astonished.

"Oh, Maurice is very clever, but not to the extent of commanding Nep's feelings."

There was another awkward silence, which Biddy broke by a speech more awkward.

"I wish you would go back to the drawing-room. It is not fair to keep you in this hot room."

"Would you really like me to go?" asked Eleanor, "or is it only that you fear you are keeping me against my will? Because, indeed, I like to stay."

"You are very good, but I really mustn't keep you. See, I have a delightful book, and shall be quite happy."

Eleanor rose, offended, and went back to the drawing-room. She would have been amazed if she could have seen Biddy, as the door closed upon her, snatch Nep's shaggy head to her breast, and cover it with kisses.

"You dear dog," she said, "you dear, dear old fellow! You, at least, love no statues, but only poor ugly Biddy O'Connor."

When Maurice O'Hara looked for her a little later she had gone to bed. He went back to the drawing-room then, and took his seat, as a matter of course, by Eleanor Bingham.

"I find Miss O'Connor is gone to bed," he said.
"I hope her cold is no worse."

"She says not. She was tired, perhaps, for I tried again to make friends with her, but was unsuccessful. She does not like me, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Eleanor!"

"Yes, dear Maurice. I am quite sure she does not like me. Why, she never looks at me, and that is the surest sign of dislike!"

"I don't know what has come over her; she is strange to me too. She used to be so jolly and frank. It could hardly be, Eleanor, that she knows I care for her, and plays with me as a cat with a mouse—could it?"

"I trust not, dear Maurice. I could hardly believe that of any one you cared for. She looks so very sweet, too, when she smiles."

Eleanor did not add that she had only once seen Biddy smile. The young man received her speech gratefully.

"You dear Eleanor! She is sweet looking, isn't she?"

But Maurice had no chance of discovering the cause of Biddy's humours before they left Coolbawn. The next morning she kept out of the way. Even at the railway station she clung to her father's side. The train was moving off before she permitted herself to meet his eyes. Then he brightened all over, and ran along by the side of the carriage.

"I'm coming up as soon as ever I can to inquire for that cold," he panted; and there was something in his eyes as he said it so dangerously sweet that Biddy afterwards had to remind herself again and again that he was Eleanor Bingham's lover, lest she should recall that expression too often.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN.

THE cruise to the North Sea proved less enjoyable than the summer outings had been, year after year. The boat was crowded with rather vulgar tourists, from whom it seemed impossible to get away, and the time was too short to permit of their striking away inland, and finding for themselves some hidden valley or old-world town out of the beaten track which they might make their head-quarters.

Biddy noticed, too, that her father seemed less brisk than of old. He tired more easily on their rambles, and she discovered all at once a whole regiment of new lines about his face. It struck her with the force of a blow, one day, that her father was getting to be an old man. When the suddenness had passed by and the knowledge had become less

intolerable, she was filled with a great glowing tenderness for him, which made her wonder why, since she and he were together, she could have troubled about anything.

They had been back in Merrion Square only a few hours when Carrie La Touche, whom they had left after them at Coolbawn, called. It was Peter who brought the intelligence that she was in the drawing-room to Biddy, adding—

“She’s been in an’ out like a dog at a fair the last few days, axin’ if you wor ever comin’. I don’t know what’s come to the same young lady. She used to be quiet an’ paiceable, but now you an’ her’s changed places. ’Tis you that’s settled, an’ her that’s frolicsome.”

Biddy laughed at this speech, being accustomed to Peter’s oddities; but when she entered the drawing-room, and was caught in a hurried embrace by her friend, she recognized that there really was a transformation in her, as Peter had said. She was wearing a big hat with a veil, through which one could see, but a little dimmed, her radiant and smiling face. It was Carrie La Touche blooming like a rose in some new sunshine of joy.

Biddy pushed her to arm's length, and stood looking at her.

"Now, you dear ridiculous thing," she said, "do come out of your raptures, and tell me what has happened. Has Jim got his step? or why are you looking like a bride?"

"Oh, it's not that, but I am going out to him, and we shall be married as soon as I get to Madras. I'm ashamed of being so happy. Do you know I got a very thick veil, so that people should not see me looking so absurdly happy? Besides, it's not right, as I am going to leave my mother so soon."

"Your mother has had you quite long enough."

"That's just what Maurice said."

"But how has it come about? Has Jim fallen in for money?"

"No, dear boy, he wouldn't if the skies were raining it. We're going to be poor as church mice, but neither of us minds that. To think it has all come about so easily at last. Why, I might have done it long ago, if I had only known it was so easy."

"But how have you discovered it now?"

"Maurice did it all. What a thing it is to have a man in the family! He asked me about

my engagement at Coolbawn one evening. I explained to him how perfectly hopeless it was; but he did not seem convinced, though he didn't say much. Then he insisted on coming up to Dublin with me. He had a quiet talk with my mother, and I was called in. I found her not only willing, but eager that I should write to Jim and tell him I was coming. She was so sweet about it. Of course, one couldn't expect her to keep that up, poor dear, and she's sometimes a little aggrieved about it now. But she is so interested in my frocks. Aunt Sophy is to stay on with her. Maurice has arranged it all so beautifully, and he has promised to see after her as if she were his own mother, arranging all her affairs for her, and all that. I really believe she's fonder of Maurice than of me."

"And you are buying your trousseau, Carrie?"

"Yes, I must tell you about that. Aunt Cicely has given me fifty pounds for it. She said she had no girl of her own to dress. And Maurice has given me a hundred, which I am trying not to break into. He will give me my passage as well. Isn't it dear of them?"

"Very dear."

"If you knew all Maurice has done! He has gone into our affairs, and has discovered that after making provision for my mother there will be a few hundreds left for me. I have always been rather in the dark, and never supposed there would be more than just the income for my mother. Maurice says she has really handled her affairs rather well, which pleases her. She never told me anything about them. I have been such a disappointment to her, not being a boy."

"When do you go, Carrie?"

"I hope, in about three weeks' time. Jim seems, after all his patience, as though it were suddenly quite exhausted. He cabled 'Come at once' in reply to my letter."

"Well, I'm glad, Carrie; though I still hate to lose you. You deserve your happiness. And how happy it will be after those years of parting!"

"And hopelessness, Biddy. I used never to believe that we should be married. Even if Jim had got his step, there would be my mother. I thought she could never get on without me; yet she seems to be doing all right with Aunt

Sophy. I thought she was brighter when I came back from Coolbawn than I remember her for long."

There was a little sadness in the speech to Biddy's ears.

"Well, my dear," she said, half laughing, "I daresay the companionship of a young person rather bored her. We mustn't depress old hearts by our youthfulness, you know."


"I was never exuberantly youthful, Biddy; but now I feel as if I should like to run and sing as children do, out of pure joy."

"You have long arrears of happiness to make up."

"But I was forgetting, in my chatter. Put on your hat, dear, and come round with me to Brown and Thomas's. I have kept the most important things for you to assist me in choosing. You're not too tired?"

"Not a bit. I shall love to see the things, and shan't keep you waiting a minute."

Biddy was as good as her word, and they were soon on their way to Grafton Street. She was deeply interested in the selection of the thin silks and muslins for the hot weather, and the fine woollens for the rainy season.



There was a beautifully embroidered muslin shown to them, of a soft creamy colour and exquisite texture. Carrie looked at it, and longed for it, made calculations on scraps of paper, sighed, shook her head and resolutely put it aside. Biddy watched her with a smile. When she saw Carrie had given up the thought of it, she took out her little purse, and counted the coins.

"Yes; I'll take it," she said.

"You?" said Carrie, in amazement.

"Yes, I. Do you think all the world except expectant brides are to go without pretty things? Please parcel it up for me"—to the saleswoman.

"You won't mind my taking it, Carrie?"

"Oh no. Many a less genteel parcel have I carried home. But you will be tired after all this shopping. Come and have tea with me at Mitchell's."

"No; let us go home. The Donnybrook tram will take us in five minutes. The genteel people at Mitchell's stare so that I can't drink my tea."

They went back to Merrion Square, Biddy carrying her precious parcel carefully. When they were seated at tea in the drawing-room overlooking the square, the dark trees of which were fast getting

dusty and drooping, Biddy opened her purchase, and looked at it.

"It will look well on me, Carrie?"

"Charming. The colour is so soft that it would suit almost any one."

"You have ceased to desire it, then?"

"Quite. I am too happy a woman to set my heart on a frock."

"But you must desire it a little. Ah, do; for I bought it for you."

"For me!"—with an incredulous shriek of delight.

"You're too generous, Biddy! How good you are! You deserve anything."

"Even another Jim? No? There is none other, I suppose. Well, tell Jim that he must like this frock, because it was given you by some one who loved you dearly. You will wear it, and let him see it?"

"Wear it! Why, darling Biddy, it is to be my wedding dress. It is the very thing I had imagined for it."

"I did not know," said Biddy; "I never hoped to give you anything so sacred. I thought your mother would have first claim."

"Oh, poor dear," said Carrie, blushing; "she is too great an invalid to attend to my trousseau. She likes to look at the things when I have bought them, but she would never enter a shop. Why, she has her own things brought to her for her choice!"

"By the way," said Biddy, nervously, "all at Coolbawn are well, I suppose?"

"Very well. But I forgot. I've been thinking so much of my own affairs. They've had a curious thing happen since I left. Aunt Cicely, it seems, has a plot of land somewhere in America. They've never bothered about it, believing it worthless. An old tenant of her father's, to whom they had been very good, left it to Aunt Cicely. Well, it seems that petroleum has been discovered on the land, I don't know in what quantity, for things were still undeveloped when Maurice left us. I haven't heard anything since he went back. They wrote to him to come, or he would have waited to put me on board the P. and O. at Tilbury. Dear fellow, he was vexed that I should have to go alone, though I assured him I was able to take care of myself. I shall only be alone to Euston, for Jim's father and

sisters live in London, you know, and I am to stay with them a day or two."

"You will like that?"

"In a way. But I am anxious to push on. I, too, have been patient, Biddy, but now, when my happiness is in sight, I feel as if I could scarcely endure the days and weeks intervening. I feel as if something must happen, even yet, to snatch it from me."

"Nothing will happen, dearest. But it is so natural to feel like that. I can imagine it exactly."

"Dear Biddy, you were always sympathetic. I wish you were going to be married too."

The girls looked at each other as if each had an impulse to speak out. But the impulse, if it were there, passed, and Biddy retorted mockingly—

"As if no happiness were to be had without marriage, you dear bride! Shall I take papa's pink-eyed little pupil, Mr. Scorer, who is languishing for me, and who drops his hat, gloves, and stick, if I happen to meet him in the hall? Or shall it be old Professor Destrees, who has loved me since I was first carried in to dessert and set upon his knee?"

"Never mind, Biddy, your turn will come. By

the way, Maurice was so disappointed at not seeing you. He hoped to the last that you would have got back before he returned."

"I'm sorry," said Biddy, shyly.

A few weeks later, Biddy went down to Kingstown with her friend, to see her on board the mail boat. She had struggled valiantly to keep back the tears, so as not to depress Carrie, who was rather melancholy after the parting from her mother. "Keep up your heart," she kept whispering to her, "and think of Jim at the other end of the journey!"

But *she* had no such compensation in view; and with the hopelessness of youth, she felt that her friend's going had snapped her strongest link with Coolbawn. Just at the last, as they stood on the boat watching the late passengers crossing the gangway, Carrie whispered to her, hurriedly, "Biddy, darling, I'll let you know as soon as ever there's an address to write to. You've been so good to me, and I want you to be happy. If there is anything to tell soon, you will let me know at once. I shall be hoping and praying."

But Biddy never answered a word.

That evening after dinner she joined her father in

his study. He looked up in surprise, for she seldom came there. Without answering his look, she stood by the mantelpiece and took in the aspect of the room. The shaded lamp threw a little light around it; on her father's desk and table, on his worn face and his head where the grey hairs had come quickly of late. The room struck coldly, and looked comfortless, with its dusty heaps of books and papers everywhere. It was still September, but the evenings had begun to be cold.

"May I stay, papa?" she said. "I shall be as quiet as a mouse. I feel a little lonely this evening."

"My poor little girl! Of course you may stay. You miss your friend, eh? Ah, partings are very sad things."

"Papa, would you mind if I came every evening and sat here? I should be so quiet. You don't know how quiet we are in the drawing-room of evenings, the dogs and I; you would not know we were there."

"Do come, my little daughter. I'm a selfish old fellow to have shut you out so long."

"I should have asked to come before, darling."

But now I am come, may I light the fire? You ought to have a fire here every evening. I have been neglecting you."

"Certainly. Light the fire, dear. I am a little cold, now I come to think of it."

Biddy put a match to the fire, and it was soon blazing and sputtering. Her father had not gone back to his work. He was regarding her with mild eyes of pleasure. When the fire had quite kindled, she came over to his desk.

"Now, I want this pulled a little nearer, so as to stand slantwise in that corner. You'll be out of any draught, and warm. And my chair will stand this side. I'll come here with my book every evening while you work. I'll only bring in Flora, as she's the quietest of the dogs, and can be trusted not to jump about. It will be so much more comfortable for you and me to be together of evenings, darling. You see, we're all each other has."

"Yes, Biddy," assented the Doctor, who had been moving his desk in accordance with his daughter's instructions.

She pushed him into his chair, and then curled up in her own, the other side of the hearth. He

smiled at her across the leaping firelight, and she smiled back at him. He got up and rubbed his hands, and turned himself about in the warm glow.

"Upon my word, you have made it homelike, Biddy, you and the fire. Why didn't you come before, little girl?"

"To think," said Biddy, with resentment, "of you in the cold study, and me in the cold drawing-room all those years! Now, go back to your work, or you'll think I'm idling you. The new arrangement will only be hard on the dogs, except Flora; they'll have to go to bed at candle-light."

The next day, when Dr. O'Connor came in from his lecture, he was conscious of some pleasant change in the room, though what it was he would have found it hard to say. His face brightened, however, as he recognized that Biddy had been there, by the little bouquet of late roses on his desk.

Biddy had spent a dutiful morning dusting and setting straight with discretion, so as not to muddle her father's papers. She had added a few little comforts, a cushion for his chair and a foot-stool for his desk, which the Doctor would have despised,

and would certainly not have used it if he had noticed them. Biddy had burst into tears over the dusting of the desk. A very shabby, very dirty, and rather foul old pipe, lying there, had somehow touched her to the quick.

"To think," she said with a rush of motherly compassion, "how I've neglected him all those years, and that he was cold in this musty dusty horrid study while I was taken up with a lot of silly nonsense! Oh, what a wretched, selfish creature I am!"

She kissed the unsavoury old pipe as she restored it to its place, and henceforward her sacred duty was to take charge of the study.

"There's that change come over you, Miss Biddy," said Peter, one day, "that I'm afeard it's goin' to die you are. Sure, the masther wouldn't like all that dustin' if he was aware of it, at all, at all! He'd be more comfortable with what he was used to all his days."

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH, LIKE A FRIEND'S VOICE.

THE year waned to October, and no word had come from Maurice O'Hara or from Coolbawn. The pleasant intimacy of last summer might have been only a dream. The promised letter from Carrie had not come either. Dr. O'Connor, generally the least observant of men, at last noticed and commented upon the silence.

"Strange that young O'Hara does not write, Biddy. I wonder whether his book has found a publisher."

"It doesn't matter, papa," said Biddy. "We did without the O'Haras for years very happily, and we can do without them now."

"Oh, of course," said the Doctor, feeling rather snubbed. "But I liked the young fellow, and he

seemed fond of me. Probably there is a good explanation of his silence."

"Probably," said Biddy; and then, after a thought that he was, no doubt, too much engrossed with Eleanor Bingham to think of anything else, she came round to the back of her father's chair, and kissed the top of his grey head.

"Of course he was fond of you," she said vehemently. "He would be a perfect brute if he wasn't."

The Doctor was sometimes puzzled by Biddy's behaviour at this time, but, on the whole, he was very happy. His daughter had discovered a new demonstrative affection for him, which was quite amazingly sweet. He was conscious, too, of an access of comfort in his life, and had come to look forward to those evenings of fire and lamplight, when he and Biddy sat opposite each other, too happy with each other to need much talk about it.

The first frosts had come, and, one day of late October, Biddy got up with a heavy heart. She did not know what ailed her. She had been keeping her heart warm all this time with assiduous love for her father; but this day, though she did

not love him less but rather more, the comfort seemed to have gone out of it. She sat opposite to him at breakfast, her heart fairly aching with love and pity for him. How grey and careworn he had become, and how stooped !

Her heart gave a great leap of alarm as she realized that he was looking ill. She resolved that she would speak to him that night, and coax him to see a doctor. When he got up to go to his lectures she followed him into the hall with anxious love, insisting that he should wear his muffler, and herself helping him into his overcoat, while Peter stood by disapproving.

"And what will you do to-day, little woman?" he asked at the last moment.

"I have a headache, and am going out with the dogs on top of the steam tram. The mountain air will blow the cobwebs out of my brain."

"Well, take care of yourself, darling," the Doctor said fondly, as he took his hat and cane and departed.

Biddy ate her modest lunch of bread and cheese at a wayside hostelry for cyclists, and fed the dogs on rather ancient biscuits; but the hours in the open air did not remove the nameless depression

that lay heavily at her heart. The country was bathed in the cold, bright sunshine of autumn, and the belts of trees, dotted here and there through the green and golden country, showed as many hues as the breast of a pheasant; but Biddy's heart was heavy, and she looked at the beauty with dull eyes.

It was getting well on in the afternoon when she got back to town.

As she drew near her own door she noticed—at first with surprise, then with alarm—that there was a carriage, which she recognized as that of Dr. Kennedy, an old friend of her father's, standing at the door. She hastened her steps, though she was conscious of a trembling in her limbs. The door was opened by Peter, and seeing the old man's face she seemed to realize all at once what had happened, and to have known it for a long time. He was crying, and shaking like a leaf. At the sight of her he put out his hands in helpless terror, as if to ward her off, and then stumbled before her into the hall, and when she had followed, shut the door.

"Oh, Peter!" cried poor Biddy, with an inarticulate moan. "Papa—oh, Peter, what is it? What has happened?"

"Whisht, jewel!" said the old fellow, putting his arm about her. "Come in here, an' see Mrs. Flaherty, dear. Sure, 'twould break his heart if he could see you lookin' like that!"

The dining-room door opened, and Mrs. Rody Flaherty came into the hall. Biddy had never cultivated her neighbours much, and she was conscious of a bewildered wonder at seeing Mrs. Rody's comely face streaked with tears.

"My poor child," she said; "my poor, poor child!" and caught Biddy into her motherly arms.

She led her into the dining-room, which had a strange desolate look in the pale light. She kept her arm about the girl as she brought her to a sofa. Then she took the rumpled red head on her breast, and cried as tenderly over Biddy as if she had been the youngest of the Flaherties, who was still in the nursery. But Biddy had no tears. Wide-eyed and despairing she took her grief, as the old servant said, "onnatural!"

She only spoke when Dr. Kennedy came quietly into the room.

"I may see him, Dr. Kennedy?"

"Yes, child. And remember how brave he would

have wished you to be. It has been so easy with him. God send us all as easy a deliverance when our time comes !”

“ How did it happen ? ”

“ He was sitting at his desk writing a letter. He could hardly have had a pang. Peter found him with the pen still wet in his hand. I was here in five minutes, but nothing could be done. It was sudden failure of the heart’s action.”

Biddy stood up, and followed the doctor across the hall to the half-lighted study. She noticed, as she entered, the two chairs standing sociably inclined towards each other, as they had drawn them every evening of late. An intolerable pang smote her at the sight. Oh, yesterday, yesterday, that could never come again ! Then she turned towards the sofa on which they had laid him.

His face lay towards the portrait of his wife ; and the dead woman smiled down on him, as though once again he were hers in a triumphant summer of love—as he had been hers through all the autumn and winter of his life, after he had lost her. He looked inscrutably wise and calm, as the dead always look ; and the lines which lately had gathered thick in his

face were smoothed away, so that he looked much younger than the dusty old father of latter years. Biddy dropped down by him without a word, and laid her cheek against his shabby old coat-sleeve.

She did not know how long she was there. The house was very silent, for the subdued murmurs in the dining-room did not reach her ears. But she was conscious, through all her dumb agony, that there was an unwonted bustle in the streets. Newsboys were calling "*Stop - Press Edition*;" outside-cars were flying by rapidly; and knots of people gathered together on the pavement seemed to be discussing something eagerly and angrily. She felt herself, in a stunned kind of way, wondering what it could be, what could be the matter. There was matter enough with her, Biddy O'Connor, to make her die of it; but what could people in the streets know about that?

After a time Mrs. Flaherty came in on tip-toe.

"Come with me, darling," she said; "they are going to take him upstairs."

Biddy allowed herself to be led away.

"Now, my child," said Mrs. Rody, "you have to eat something. Yes, yes, he would have said you

must. You are not to be ill on our hands in addition to all the other trouble."

She held a cup of strong beef tea to the girl's lips, and made her swallow it by degrees. She followed it with a glass of old port. Poor Biddy, fortified by the generous food, presently began to feel the ache of her sorrow more cruelly. When she had rested a little, Mrs. Rody took up her bonnet.

"Now, my darling," she said, "I am going to leave you for a little while. I've to see that John gets his dinner, and to give the keys to my sister, Sabina. Then I'll come back for you, and you can see him again."

After that, Biddy bore her great desolation with entire faith and fortitude. For nearly all the time that remained she sat or knelt near her beloved dead, praying, as she had never before known how to pray, with a passion, a resignation, and an assurance which cast out terror and despair.

Then the cold morning came when the bell of the campanile in the College tolled incessantly; and the dead man's colleagues and the students who had loved him came walking, two by two, through the muddy streets, to follow him to his last resting-place.

Biddy had asked to go, too; and many a look of honest and tender pity was cast at the Doctor's young daughter as she stood at the grave's edge and listened to the funeral service—very pale, but very calm. Her good friend Mrs. Rody was still by her side.

They returned to the desolate house as they had come, with Dr. Kennedy and her father's solicitor, Mr. Burgess. The two men were silent and grave, but Biddy did not notice them. She sat staring at the streets and houses as they went by, seeing nothing but her own bereaved life, which seemed to stretch away immeasurably long before her. She had the anguish of youth because she was young, and such a desert of time must elapse before she, too, could take the dead man's journey.

When they arrived at the house, where the blinds had been all drawn up since morning, Biddy would have gone upstairs to her own little room to be alone, but Mr. Burgess stopped her.

"Will you come into the study, Miss O'Connor?" he said. "There is a little business that must be talked over."

Biddy followed without a word, and Mrs.

Flaherty, with a deeper shade of compassion in her face, seated herself in a chair close to the one the lawyer had set for Biddy by the study table.

Mr. Burgess cleared his throat, as if he felt it difficult to begin. He opened a paper, and spread it out before him on the table, looking it over for a moment, as if he were not sure of the contents. Then he sat upright, and began :—

“ Before reading your father’s will, Miss O’Connor, I must explain to you that his affairs at the time this will was drawn, and, indeed, up to the last day of his life, were in a much more satisfactory condition than unfortunately they stand at present.”

He paused, and looked at Biddy over his spectacles with a grave compassion which stirred her wonder a little. As if anything could matter now !

“ You have been in so much trouble, Miss O’Connor,” he went on, “ that you probably have heard nothing of an event which has brought much distress to this country, and which unhappily affects your father’s provision for you deeply. Your father had all his savings invested in the Imperial

Bank. On Tuesday, I am sorry to say, the bank suspended payment. We thought, at first, that the shock of the news had hastened his end, but now we have reason to think he knew nothing of it. He had come home unusually early, and had been writing in the study all the early afternoon, and had seen no one. Your old man-servant had brought him the evening paper which contained the intelligence ; but it was found afterwards lying unopened. I am deeply glad my old friend was spared the pang of that knowledge. You would have had a comfortable little fortune, Miss O'Connor, but for these unforeseen troubles. My friend and client's investments would have brought you in a matter of £500 a year, whereas now——"

"I am poor, I suppose," said Biddy. "But I shall have enough to live upon."

"There will be the price for which the lease of this house will sell, and there will be the proceeds of the sale of the furniture. Your father held some copyrights in his books also—but I fear, all told, there will be a very slender sum indeed to come to you, my dear young lady."

"Enough for me to live somewhere quietly with the dogs?"

"No, my dear, I am afraid not."

"Burgess," said Dr. Kennedy; "Dr. O'Connor's old friends will not permit his little girl to go penniless. As soon as this is known there will be many willing hands to help."

"Oh no, no," cried Biddy. "I couldn't endure that, Dr. Kennedy."

"My house, I am sure," broke in Mrs. Rody, "is open for this darling child as long as she will stay."

Biddy stopped her with a smile, half humorous, half pathetic. She knew that the Flaherty tenants had paid no rent to speak of for the last half-dozen years, and that the Merrion Square house had a tow-headed young Flaherty on every square yard of it nearly.

"No, you darling woman," she said. "I must begin somewhere else, somewhere away from this."

"Your father was actually engaged on a letter which seems to concern you at the last moment of his life. You will perhaps be able to tell us to whom it is addressed. This is the letter."

Biddy held out a trembling hand for it.

"No, my dear, I had better read it for you. Afterwards it will be yours, of course. There are only a few lines, and it runs as follows :—

" ' MY DEAR MARGARET,

" ' Do you remember the evening, now some years ago, when you dined with me and my little girl, and promised me afterwards that if the occasion arose you would see after her? Well, I have begun to feel rather feeble, and the child is on my mind. If I were taken, Blanche is her one relative, and though I think Blanche would not be unkind to her dead sister's only child, frankly I would rather you had her. You envied her to me that evening, do you remember? If I go she may be yours. She will not come to you as a burden, for——'

"That is all he had written. Do you know to whom the letter was addressed?"

"I remember a lady coming to our house several years ago who was an old friend of——"—Biddy choked for an instant, and then went on—"of

his. I know her name was Margaret. She was a Mrs. Montague, a widow lady. That is all I know. I don't know where she lived. She seemed to be a great traveller, and always going about."

"That would be the lady, no doubt," said the lawyer, musingly. "Well, we must make inquiries about her. The other lady referred to in the letter is, no doubt, the wife of the Mr. Sotheran, who is joint executor with Dr. Kennedy of your father's will."

"Oh yes," said Biddy, indifferently, "it is my aunt Blanche, Mrs. Sotheran. I haven't seen her since I was a baby."

"Well, pending the result of our inquiries about Mrs. Montague, we had better write to Mrs. Sotheran. I am sorry I did not know where to write to her before. The address is, I think, somewhere in the west of London."

"18, Surrey Square, W.," said Biddy, mechanically.

"And now I must call in your old servants to hear the will read," said the lawyer. "There is a legacy to each of them, though of course recent

events will hardly permit your father's wishes in the matter to be carried out."

"Oh, but they must," said Biddy, vehemently. "If it takes every penny, they must."

The lawyer rang the bell, and Peter and Mrs. Behan appeared, and took the seats pointed out to them. The old servants seemed greatly broken down, and during the reading of the will the old woman kept staunching the tears which flowed faster and faster down her cheeks. When the reading was concluded, Mr. Burgess went on to explain the loss of the Doctor's property, and the difficulty of paying the legacies which he had left to these faithful old servants. But Peter stopped him halfway.

"You'll excuse me, sir, but it'll save trouble if I say that nayther of us would touch a penny of it, though proud and thankful we are that the thought of us was in his heart. I can spake for this woman here, sir, for I've promised to change her name to Hegarty as soon as convanient. We've both a trifle saved, sir, an' mane to start a shuparior house for lettin' out apartments. My love to you, Miss Biddy," he said, nodding across to the pale girl, "and the best room in that house is yours, aye, the

same as if you was now occupyin' it. I had wind of the throuble, sir, for I knew where the master kep his bit o' money; an' sez I to Mrs. Behan, 'Where would 'she go, ma'am, barrin' some better people claims her, than to thim she was used to from the cradle?' An' she says to me, 'Where indeed, Peter Hegarty? An' if you said less you'd never put the ring on me.'"

"Oh, Peter!" cried out Biddy, running to the old servants, and bursting into tears as she took a hand of each.

"Whisht, now, Miss Biddy!" said Peter. "Sure 'tis only sinse. Who else, I'd like to know, 'ud put up wid them poor bastes o' dogs?"

CHAPTER XVI.


BITTER BREAD.

A FEW days later Mr. Sotheran himself arrived to take over Biddy. He was a delicate-looking man, with a gentle and shrewd face, and Biddy was somehow relieved to see him instead of the aunt Blanche, for whom she vaguely imagined her father had had a dislike.

He came one morning by the mail ; and, after expressing his sympathy, took out his watch, and, studying it, inquired if Miss O'Connor would be ready to start by the evening mail.

"The poor child," said Mrs. Rody, indignantly, "as if she wouldn't want a few weeks at least to pick up her bits of things, and put them together, and to say good-bye to her friends."

But Biddy knew that the quiet little man was at the head of a big business ; and perhaps she was not



sorry to hurry over the anguish of leaving her old life behind her.

“Yes, she could be ready,” she answered, making Mr. Sotheran her friend on the spot; and she was ready, though her packing would have been the despair of anybody with the remotest sense of order.

She took nothing but her own personal belongings. Mrs. Behan and Peter were still in possession of the house, and they were to receive and keep for her certain precious relics which were not to go up for auction—her father’s desk and study chair, her mother’s portrait, and such odds and ends as were dear to her for one reason or another. The dogs were to remain till the old servants left, when they were to accompany them.

She was glad to leave the house before its familiar things were all scattered. For her the soul of it was in ruins, but she was glad to think of its bodily presence as it had been in the years when she had squandered her happiness, and had not known it for what it was.

She went through the house alone at the last moment to say good-bye to it. She lingered in her

father's study, kissing, as she might kiss the dead, the familiar walls, and the door where his hand so often had touched it. When she closed the door, and went out, she felt that half her life was over, and wondered if those minutes had left a visible mark of suffering upon her face to last her the remainder of her days.

In the hall Mrs. Rody and all her lanky brood were waiting to say good-bye, with Peter and Mrs. Behan, trying hard to keep from tears, in the background. Biddy kissed them all round with a passion of regret she could not have believed last week a Flaherty could awake in her. She finished with the old servants, and when she came to Mrs. Behan that good woman broke down, and set the five youngest Flaherties to weeping lustily.

"Whisht, woman dear," said Peter, huskily. "The foolishness of you is amazin', settin' the childher to bawl their lives out, the crathurs, an' them not knowin' what's the matter with them, only for good nature."

But tears were not far from the old fellow's own eyes as Biddy brushed his cheek with her kiss.

She went off in a chorus of lamentation, for the

dogs, finding they were to be left behind, yelped lustily as the door closed upon their departing mistress.

Mr. Sotheran let her cry her eyes out; and Biddy was deeply grateful for his consideration. She began to feel that she should like him, and it was something to lay hold upon in the unknown life among strangers to which she was going. Though he was silent he took good care of her, and Biddy was touched at his thoughtfulness, when he produced for her a well-stocked little lunch-basket, with a bottle of good wine, which he insisted upon her sampling as soon as they had started on the long, dreary journey.

"We must keep up the system," he said, with the air of a wise old doctor. "Especially when grief has exhausted it. Now, have you a headache, my dear?"

"A slight headache," Biddy confessed.

"Ah, I thought so. I suffer a good deal that way myself. I find a small bottle of champagne an excellent remedy, for headaches so often come from exhaustion, and I've a good deal on my mind sometimes, my dear. Now, your aunt never has a headache."

"How fortunate for her!"


"Yes; she's a wonderful woman. Such calm and self-control! If the house were on fire she would retain her presence of mind just as if she were standing in her drawing-room receiving her guests for a dinner-party. She thinks I could control my headaches; but then, of course, she doesn't know. Ladies never know the brain-worries a business man has—do they, my dear?"

"I suppose not," said Biddy, with a growing alarm at the thought of the lady who was to govern her life henceforth.

"I am tiring you, my dear, I see. Now you had better lie down and have a sleep. I'm used to travelling, and I can settle you comfortably."

He was as good as his word, and Biddy after a time fell into a somewhat uneasy slumber, which lasted till they got to Euston. She awoke feeling stiff and cold, and began to draw herself up to a sitting position. Her uncle was putting their traps together, and turned round to smile at her.

"Had a little sleep, hey? That's right, though you don't look much the better for it. You'd better have a little more of your wine before we get out



of the carriage, for one is apt to be chilled sleeping in a railway carriage. We won't be very long getting home now, and you can have a warm bath, and a nice sleep, and breakfast in your own room."

London looked desolate in the dark morning, with the gas-lamps still alight, and no one in the streets but an occasional workman trudging along doggedly through the light fog. It was a long drive to Surrey Square, and Biddy fairly ached with cold and discomfort. When they had at last reached the house, Mr. Sotheran gave her in charge to a pleasant-looking maid. .

"Take great care of Miss O'Connor, Dignam," he said. "Get her a cup of tea and a hot bath, and then I dare say she will like a rest during the morning, and to have breakfast in her own room."

"Yes, sir," said the maid with an odd little lowering of the eyelids, as if to conceal some dubious expression.

She led the way to a prettily furnished bedroom; but Biddy, as she entered, shivered from the chill of the air.

"There," said the maid, "it strikes cold, don't it,

miss? I knows 'ow it is to be travellin' all night. There did ought to be a fire for you."

She looked deprecatingly at the black grate.

"Missus don't 'old with fires," she said. "But never mind. I'll say as 'ow master gave the order."

She darted from the room, and returned with an apron full of sticks and paper. In a few minutes a merry little fire was leaping in the grate, and making the room look comfortable and home-like. When Dignam had achieved this result, she turned and looked at Biddy, who was sitting in a big chair, too listless to begin undressing.

"Dear, dear," she said pityingly, "you do look fagged out to be sure, miss! A bath and a cup of tea will do you all the good in the world."

She dragged a big bath into the middle of the room, and then fetched a couple of cans of hot water and warm towels from the bathroom.

"Now, I'll take off your boots, miss, and by the time you've had your bath I'll be at the door with a cup of tea."

"You are very kind, Dignam," said Biddy.

"Why wouldn't I be? My grandfather's an Irishman, miss, and I'm kindly disposed towards Irish people."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," said Biddy, feeling a ray of comfort at her heart.

After her bath and tea, Biddy got into bed, and was in a sound sleep when she was aroused by Dignam.

"I'm downright sorry to wake you, miss," she said, "but it's missus's orders. I thought to smuggle up your breakfast on a tray, but she was too sharp for me. Missus don't 'old with breakfast in bed. The young ladies daren't have it, miss. But the poor master *will* be put out."

Biddy got up and dressed herself with the maid's assistance. Before she was halfway through, the breakfast bell pealed through the house.

"Never mind, miss," said the maid, assuringly. "She can't row you over bein' late the first mornin'."

Biddy had a sinking heart over the prospect of facing the redoubtable mistress of the house. She followed Dignam downstairs with her head swimming; and when she entered the dining-room she had the strongest inclination to turn and run away, as she had had that night long ago, when she first met Maurice O'Hara.

It seemed to her that a great many strange faces turned and looked at her. Then her aunt, a tall and stately person, with large, regular features and cold blue eyes, came forward and kissed her frostily on the cheek. There was a certain resemblance to the portrait of Biddy's mother; but whereas that was all warm, rich, and glowing, this was cold and pinched. Mrs. O'Connor had been a beautiful woman. Mrs. Sotheran was sometimes called handsome, because of her height, her fair skin, and regular features. Mrs. Sotheran's hair was a pale red instead of the flame colour Biddy had inherited from her mother. She wore it in massive bands, and drawn back from a high, cold forehead.

She pointed to a chair at the breakfast-table, and Biddy sat down, glad that her place was near Mr. Sotheran's. That little gentleman was just taking the top off his egg, and seemed surprised to see her.

"I thought you would not have joined us this morning, my dear. Wouldn't a rest have been good for you?"

Mrs. Sotheran interposed coldly. "Bridget has the good sense, I trust, to wish to conform to the

ways of the house. I hope you will not teach her anything else, Thomas. A big house like this could not possibly go on properly if the inmates had their meals when and where they liked, without any consideration for the rules of the house and the convenience of others."

"I'm sorry, my dear," said the little man, crest-fallen. "I thought one of the maids——"

"Be good enough to leave those matters to me, Thomas. Bridget must understand that in a well-conducted house regularity is considered the first principle of good manners."

Poor Biddy felt the indignant tears rushing to her eyes, and was scarcely able to answer the maid's inquiry as to whether she would take tea or coffee. She had not looked at her new cousins around the table; and now was more disinclined than ever to lift her eyes, feeling that she had been made the subject of a public and undeserved rebuke. But she had met with an unexpected champion. Her next-door neighbour suddenly spoke up in a queer, old-fashioned voice.

"'Spose you give Biddy—she isn't Bridget to me—somethin' to eat, mater, and talk afterwards

about that breakfast in bed which she hasn't had."

Biddy looked up amazed. The speaker was a boy of thirteen or so, with a small pale face and reddish-brown eyes, full of mischief and good humour.

There was a little relieved titter round the table, mingled with one or two murmurs of, "Herbert, you naughty boy!" But the stern speech which Biddy expected to hear did not follow. Instead, when she found courage to steal a look at her aunt, she intercepted an affectionate and proud gaze intended for the culprit by her side. Plainly, Mrs. Sotheran had one weak joint in her armour.

"You don't know your cousins, Bridget," she said more amiably. "That very impudent little boy beside you is my youngest son, Herbert; and this"—indicating a handsome youth of twenty or so—"is my other son, Geoffrey. Marcella, May, and Agnes you will know better presently; and our guest, Miss Lavington, too, I hope."

Biddy looked confusedly at the three girls—all subdued images of their mother,—and at the freckle-faced, plain-looking girl, far too smartly dressed for the morning, who sat at Mrs. Sotheran's right hand.

The eldest of Mrs. Sotheran's daughters was about twenty-two, the youngest sixteen. Biddy did not feel drawn towards them.

After breakfast Mr. Sotheran and his eldest son took their departure, and the girls gathered about the fire with embroidery or books in their hands. Master Herbert had announced his intention of going to try a new bicycle. Biddy wondered what she was to do, or how to fit into this uncongenial family circle, where there seemed to be no place for her; but her uncertainty was soon set at rest by her aunt.

"Come with me, Bridget," she said; "I should like a little conversation with you."

Biddy followed as though she were being led to execution.

Mrs. Sotheran had a private room of the most unattractive kind. It was handsomely furnished with resplendent silk chairs, in which no one could ever sit with comfort, and many mirrors and girandoles. There was not a footstool nor a cushion, visible; there was no litter of books or papers. A gas-fire burned in the grate, and Mrs. Sotheran's writing-table looked rather like a judge's desk.

Entrenched behind it, she had indeed put fear into the heart of many an offender.

"Sit down, Bridget," she said, pointing to one of the silk chairs.

Biddy sat down limply.

"I want a little talk with you about your way of life, now that you have come to be an inmate of my house. I make my girls lead useful lives. Just now they are a little idle, as they have a young friend staying with them; but I believe in a round of duties for making our days happy. I wonder what you can do. Would you like to help Agnes and May with their French and German?"

Biddy grew very red as she explained that she possessed but the slightest smattering of those languages. Mrs. Sotheran shook her head, as much as to say she had feared so, and asked—

"Do you know anything of music or drawing?"

"I can draw," said Biddy, "but I have never been trained. I know nothing of music."

"Oh, you Irish, with your unfortunate cleverness!" said Mrs. Sotheran. "Now tell me, is there any branch of education in which you are

properly trained, and capable of giving help to those children ? ”

“None, I am afraid. I know a little Latin and Greek. I can draw and paint a little, but I am afraid I do not know enough of anything to give instruction to others.”

“Your father seems to have neglected your education.”

“My father,” said Biddy, proudly, “always said that education was not a treadmill.”

“That was to cover his neglect of you, perhaps.”

“You mustn’t say that. I was everything in the world to him, and he thought of me in everything.”

“Very unfortunate,” said Mrs. Sotheran, “that in the end he left no provision for you. But Roderick was always unpractical. Your dear mother, also, though she was my sister, was the last person who ought to have assumed the responsibilities of a family.”

“Mrs. Sotheran,” said Biddy, in a low voice, which trembled with indignation, “my dear father had provided for me. You must know that it was through the bank failure his savings were lost. He was the dearest of fathers, and the only

trouble of my life while I had him was that we were deprived of my dear mother."

"Well, I can't say I think he did his best for you," said Mrs. Sotheran, quite unconscious of the storm she had raised in Biddy's breast. "However, we'll let that go. You will have abundant opportunities of improving yourself here. You must join Agnes at her lessons. I see we shall have to begin at the beginning with you."

"Mrs. Sotheran, do you know that I am twenty years of age?" said poor Biddy.

"Indeed! That makes it all the more difficult. I wonder if it is too late to change your accent?"

"I don't want to change my accent."

"Don't be silly, please. Your brogue will tell dreadfully against you in life. Another barbarism I want you to get rid of is the extraordinary way you wear your hair. You must fasten it up, please."

"I shall not be here very long," said Biddy, unsteadily.

"You have no other prospects that I know of. Your own income will amount to about thirty pounds a year, and you must not expect your uncle

to add to that. He has his own children to provide for. Let me see. I must find you something to do. Or perhaps you had better attend to your unpacking to-day. Put away everything tidily in your wardrobe and chest of drawers. I trust you're orderly, Bridget. But I'm afraid your country-people are not, as a rule."

What Biddy would have answered was made doubtful for ever, for at this moment Herbert's cheeky face was thrust into the room.

"If you're quite done, I want Paddy—I beg pardon, I mean Biddy—to come out with me."

"Where to, Herbert?" asked his mother, with again the wonderful softening on her hard face.

"I want Biddy to come with me to look at a Starley Rover I'm going to buy, if I fancy it."

"A Starlight Rover! What is a Starlight Rover?"

"A bike, mother; though, if it's all the same to you to call it Starley 'twould be more agreeable to me. Come along, Biddy. Here's Akbar mad to get out."

At the mention of his name, Akbar, a very good-looking bull-dog, thrust his nose and all

his teeth between his master's legs and the door-post.

"Do take away that fright of a dog!" said Mrs. Sotheran, imploringly.

"Fright? He isn't half such a fright as those wretched girls huddling over the morning-room fire with their trashy crewel work. I went in there to look at my dormouse, but hanged if I hadn't to run out! The sight of 'em turned me sick!"

"You ridiculous boy! Very well, Bridget. You'd better go with Herbert, since he wants you. He's a strange boy, isn't he?"

"Not so strange as all that, mater. Biddy—I beg her pardon, Paddy—is the right sort of girl for me. I'll take her to the Regent's Canal one day, when I go ratting with Akbar. I'm jolly glad she's come."

"Thank you," said Biddy, with sincerity.

When they were crossing the Park to the bicycle shop Herbert, who had been entertaining his companion with a deal of shrewd, old-fashioned talk mixed with boyish slang, suddenly pulled up, and looked seriously at his companion.

"I say, old girl," he began, "I want you not

to think too bad of the mater. She isn't half a bad sort. Only dad's got her into such confoundedly bad ways."

"Why, Herbert——"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say." Biddy wondered how he did, for she didn't know herself. "Ill-assorted marriages are the devil, Biddy. Mother'd have been no end of a good sort if she'd married a chap like me. Women want a strong hand over them. There's dad—there's no one like dad, and I'm downright proud of him, I can tell you. But dad's no match for the mater. Too soft with her, dad is—and, confound it, I'm the only master she has in the world."

Biddy laughed her first laugh since her sorrow, and the lad, who had been serious enough, grinned in sympathy—a wide, humorous grin, which it would be impossible to withstand. After all, thought Biddy, even life at Surrey Square would have its compensations.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE COUNTRY.

BIDDY's first day in London was spent chiefly out-of-doors. After the Starley Rover had been seen and found wanting, and Akbar brought back to his kennel, Herbert proposed a ride on top of an omnibus, and lunch at an A B C shop, after which they went to inspect some white rats in Soho, of which the boy was anxious to become the possessor. When Biddy demurred to spending the day like this, lest Mrs. Sotheran should be vexed, Herbert assured her it was all right.

"So long as I'm pleased the mater's satisfied," he said. "She has entire confidence in me."

During that day of comradeship they became quite good friends, and Biddy learned with a sinking of the heart that in a few days Herbert was to return to school.

"I ought to be there now," he volunteered, "but that I got a cold at the end of the Vac. It's a beastly place, Spooner's is. Old Spooner ought to wear petticoats for all the man there is about him. You should hear him squeak when he sat down one day on my hedgehog! The mater thinks Spooner's is the best place for me, better than a public school. She fancies I'm delicate, and that they'd kick me at Harrow. But it's my last year at Spoonfed's—that's what I call it. I've made up my mind that, after the Long, it'll be Harrow or home. The dad's on my side; and the mater knows better than to hold out, once my mind's made up."

"I'm very sorry you're going, Herbert."

"So'm I, now you've come. As a rule I can't stand girls. They're nearly always sneaks, and then they're so squeamish. I turned a tin of live bait—maggots, you know—out of my pocket, one day, in the middle of them, as they sat chattering round the drawing-room fire. You should have heard 'em squeal!"

"I daresay live bait is rather nasty. But it will be lonely when you go, old fellow."

"Think you can hold out till Christmas?" the boy

inquired anxiously. "Because, if you can't, I might get up a cough or something—I'm not particular what—that 'ud last me till I was done with Spoonfed's."

Mrs. Sotheran received quite graciously her son's explanation of his cousin's absence. Indeed, she seemed rather pleased than otherwise. She said, with an approach to graciousness—

"Well, Herbert, if Bridget keeps you from playing your usual pranks, I'm sure I shall be glad that you are in her company. You won't let him skate on the Serpentine, Bridget, so long as the ice is marked dangerous?"

"I'd rather get by the coppers and have one dash across the ice, with it splintering in every direction, and the people screaming, than all the skating you could give me afterwards."

"You dreadful boy! You are more anxiety to me than your brother and all your sisters have ever been."

"Which I ought to be," said the youth with a grimace.

Biddy thought that the Sotheran girls and their friend regarded her with suspicion. When she made

some timid advances to them in the drawing-room after dinner they seemed to draw their circle a little closer so as to exclude her. Miss Lavington seemed to be the leader in this act of ostracism, and the other girls only followed her like sheep.

Biddy would have been very lonely but for the two boys.

The elder, Geoffrey, came up to her in the drawing-room, and made friendly overtures, which she was glad to respond to, being lonely as she was. Her uncle had withdrawn to his study after dinner. Her aunt was reading a book by the light of a shaded lamp.

Presently there was a little stir in the group by the fireplace. Miss Lavington was going to sing. Biddy closed the album her cousin Geoffrey had been showing her, and waited for the song. For the first time then she noticed her small friend sitting the other side of the room with his hands deep in his trousers pocket, and his gaze gloomily fixed on the toes of his boots. She tried to catch his eye, but he would not look her way.

"Geoffrey," said Mrs. Sotheran, very pointedly, "go and turn Gertrude's music for her, please."

The young gentleman got up, rather unwillingly, and went towards the piano. Herbert, who had looked up at his mother's speech, strolled across and dropped into the chair just vacated. The song was a vapid one, and the voice thin and untuneful, but, when it had ceased, Mrs. Sotheran thanked the singer with effusion. Before she could leave the piano Herbert whispered to Biddy—

"Come out to the conservatory. 'Tis ever so much jollier than here. Oh, you needn't look at the mater. She'll be quite satisfied."

Biddy, not at all unwilling, followed the young gentleman. She took the rocking-chair he found for her, and dropped into it with a sigh. The sweet, damp air, the quietness and semi-darkness, were grateful to her after the unfriendly atmosphere of the drawing-room. Herbert echoed her sigh as he took a chair opposite to hers, and leant forward with his chin on his hand.

"I've got inside Geoffrey for once," he remarked.

"How?"

"He'd like to be in my shoes, but he's not going to be. He isn't half bad, but he can't do all he likes

in this world; none of us can. The mater means him to marry that hateful Lavington thing. It's rough on Geoff, but, as far as marrying goes, women are much of a muchness. I say, Biddy, when I'm off to Spoonfed's, and can't protect you any longer, don't have that fellow hanging round, will you? Remember, I was your first friend."

"I don't suppose he'll want to," said Biddy.

"Won't he, though? He says you've eyes like forget-me-nots and cheeks like a peach. 'Hands off, young man,' says I, 'it's the Lavington eyes and cheeks you've to consider.' I think I heard a little cuss word between his teeth; in fact, I know he called me a 'damn cheeky young cub.' But don't you encourage him when I'm gone, now will you?"

"I shall try not to," said Biddy, demurely.

On the whole, her first day at Surrey Square had not been so bad. She would hope that, after the friendly Herbert had gone, other compensations might be discovered. She had made up her mind that she would not eat Mrs. Sotheran's bread for long. She was young and strong, she said to herself, and surely there must be something in the world she could do to supplement her thirty pounds a year!

She had acquiesced in the coming to her aunt Blanche, because at the time she was too stunned to strike out an original plan for herself. But now she was determined that her stay under this uncongenial roof must be a short one. She would write to her friends, and tell them she wanted something to do. What was she fit for, she wondered! She was too ignorant for a governess. A companionship—that refuge of the destitute—she might be able to fill: she was strong, as she had said, and could read aloud for a long time at a stretch; she could attend to domestic pets; and she thought she could bear with equanimity the exactions of an elderly person.

Now, who could she ask to help her in finding work? Mrs. Rody was out of the question, because she would have devised a necessity for a companion on the spot, and have added another useless inmate to her already large and needy household.

Peter and Mrs. Behan must not know she was unhappy. She had already composed a letter to them in which she should paint herself as “the white-headed boy” among her newly found relatives.

Dr. Kennedy and Mr. Burgess would do. They



would probably try to dissuade her, but they would have the will to help, and could be trusted not to talk.

She was considering these things as she combed and brushed her refractory hair at the glass. Her thoughts went on through the rather limited list of her friends, and stopped at the O'Haras. If any one had been watching her they would have seen that she turned painfully red, and then very pale. O'Hara's silence at the time of her father's death had been the bitterest stab of all.

"You were fond of him, my darling," she said bitterly, "and believed in him, judging him by yourself. But he was never what we thought him—you and I, and he hadn't the heart to be grieved and shocked when you went away."

In the first days after her father's death, Biddy had made sure O'Hara would come; but as the days went by, without a sign of him, her heart had hardened to an exceedingly bitter resentment against him. She might have forgiven his playing with her while he really belonged to another woman, but she could never, never forgive his coldness and indifference to her dead. With a dramatic gesture

of her hands, she swept the O'Haras out of her life.

"Even you, Carrie," she said aloud, "must go, though we have been loyal friends for so long. I never want to hear an O'Hara mentioned; and you can do without me, now you have your Jim."

She thought sometimes yearningly of Mrs. Montague, between whom and her father she vaguely suspected a more than common affection. But where to find her, Biddy knew not. She might be at the ends of the earth, and Biddy felt herself to be hopelessly lost in London.

Before she slept she wrote her letters of appeal to her father's two friends.

The replies which came in due course were not encouraging, Mr. Burgess openly pooh-poohed the idea of Biddy seeking her fortune when all the good things of the world surrounded her under her aunt's roof.

He plainly regarded Biddy's distaste for her present life as a thing that would pass. He told her that any pride on her part would be an absurdity, as her aunt and uncle were her natural protectors,

and were well known to be immensely wealthy. "You will thank me, one day, for speaking plainly to you," he concluded. And Biddy flung the letter to one side with an impatient sigh.

Dr. Kennedy, more sympathetic, said that if her unhappiness continued he would do his best to help her. But he, too, did not believe that it would continue. "Home-sickness is natural," he wrote, "and no doubt at first your aunt may fail to understand or sympathize with you. But by-and-by you will make a place in the family for yourself, and will wonder that you ever desired to be at the beck and call of some spoilt old hypochondriac."

"You stupid, stupid men!" said Biddy. "Little you know about it."

Things changed distinctly for the worse after Herbert had gone back to school. Biddy had really felt the ægis of his protection over her while he remained. Her aunt had even seemed to regard her with complacency because of the friendship with her adored youngest son. But after Herbert had gone she had for friends only her uncle, who was always absently kind to her in those short intervals when she met him—and Geoffrey, whose friendship

she discovered presently was more of a disservice than a service.

Miss Lavington still remained on ; and every day it seemed that Geoffrey obeyed his mother's whip with less grace.

The heiress did not show better because of his neglect. She was a thick-skinned, thick-lipped, black-browed girl, who conceivably might not have been bad looking if she were well pleased, but on whom bad temper sat peculiarly ill. She did not conceal her distaste for Biddy ; and so ill-tempered was she, that her satellites, the three girls, began to show signs of deserting her.

At last she announced her intention of leaving. It was at breakfast, one morning ; and her news met with a varied reception.

" Oh, surely, my dear Gertrude, you will not leave us so soon ! " said Mrs. Sotheran. " You know you promised to remain over Christmas, and we shall all be so dreadfully disappointed."

As she spoke she shot a glance of anger in the direction of the unconscious Biddy.

Marcella, the eldest girl, who was not very bright, murmured something about their having looked

forward to Gertrude sharing the Christmas gaieties with them; but Miss Lavington laughed a little scornfully.

"With so many girls in the house I shall never be missed," she said. "Why, there are four of you to go everywhere!"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Sotheran. "Agnes is not out yet; and Bridget, of course, will not go anywhere while she is in mourning. Pray think it over, dear Gertrude, and don't leave us disconsolate."

Miss Lavington looked sharply round the table. Mr. Sotheran was reading the money market report in his morning paper, and had plainly not heard a word of the discussion. Geoffrey was looking down at his plate, having resolutely refused to meet his mother's eye. The three girls were quite willing to follow the maternal lead, but did nothing spontaneously.

"Oh, I don't suppose I shall be missed," said the heiress acridly. "But in any case I've made up my mind."

Mrs. Sotheran said no more; but her cold blue eyes had an angry light in them.

After breakfast Biddy went upstairs to her room. It was her one place of refuge in the house, though she was not always safe there. She had an hour or two before the German master should arrive, for she was sharing Agnes's lessons, as her aunt had suggested.

She began tidying and setting to rights ; for she could never be sure but that her aunt would pay her a visit, and would spy out any disorder in her belongings. Poor Biddy, who had been free to answer every call of the wind or the weather—to fare abroad what hour she would and return what hour she would, when the weather was fine ; or to be on the hearthrug with her novel all day, if out-of-doors was uninviting—Biddy was bound by rule and restriction. She might not even walk in Kensington Gardens without one of her cousins ; and with them Biddy had scant enjoyment.

She had just finished setting her room to rights when a knock came to the door, and her aunt's cold voice asked if she might come in.

Biddy mentally thanked her stars that there was nothing to be found fault with. She had never known what disapproval was in the old

days, at least from any one with whom she was intimately associated, and felt bitterly hurt at living as she now did in an atmosphere of it.

Mrs. Sotheran took a chair, having first swept the four corners of the room with her eyes. There was nothing to object to within sight.

"I wish to speak to you about one or two things, Bridget," she said. "I was passing your door yesterday morning when Dignam was making your bed. I heard you talking to her in a way which struck me as being rather familiar. Please don't do that. There"—lifting her hand as Biddy would have spoken,—“that is enough about it! The other matter I wish to speak to you about is your cousin Geoffrey. I am very much vexed that he has chosen of late, out of sheer perversity, to neglect Miss Lavington for you. You heard her say this morning that she would only remain another day. I am not surprised. Geoffrey has been hardly commonly polite to her since you came.”

Biddy would have made an indignant disclaimer of any responsibility, but again Mrs. Sotheran lifted her hand peremptorily.

"You will, please, not encourage him, that is all.

I am exceedingly vexed with him ; and he will no doubt be sorry himself when he realizes what he has done. I see he has your photograph on his mantelpiece. Young ladies do not usually give their photographs to young gentlemen."

"I never gave it to him. He must have taken it from my album."

"I can hardly believe a gentleman would steal a lady's photograph," said Mrs. Sotheran. "But enough of that. I trust the mischief with Gertrude Lavington is not irreparable. They have grown up together, and it has always been understood that they should marry. Do you know that she has half a million of money?"

"No," said Biddy ; "and I shouldn't think it matters."

"That is not a becoming speech for a penniless girl. However, you now understand my wishes in the matter. I am not blaming you too much. I dare say the boy is somewhat to blame. You will see yourself how wrong it would be for you to come into a house and set so hopelessly wrong matters that intimately concern the happiness of its inmates."

"You may be assured," said Biddy, vexedly, "that

I shall not allow your son to speak to me for the future beyond the most ordinary greeting."

"I am glad you take so sensible a view of it."

Mrs. Sotheran spread out her skirts, and sailed away, with a pleasant consciousness of having done her best to set a difficult matter right. She spent the rest of the day in trying to soothe the heiress's wounded vanity; and as the vanity was an abnormal quality, she had succeeded by the evening in persuading her not to go for at least a week.

It went to Biddy's heart to carry out her angry promise of ostracizing Geoffrey, whom she really liked; and the only result of her turning her back on him was to make him sullen, and less than ever inclined to be civil to Miss Lavington.

Mrs. Sotheran at last sought out her husband, to complain of their son's conduct.

"Rude to Miss Lavington, is he?" said the father, pushing his spectacles up on his forehead in a distracted way. "I'm very sorry. It's not like Geoff to be rude to a lady. What is it all about?"

"You know he was attached to Gertrude Lavington till that wretched girl, my niece, came over," said Mrs. Sotheran, with bitterness.

"Attached? Not a bit of it! Why should he be—a pretty lad like Geoff? Even her half-million wouldn't have made me look at her when I was his age. And taken with little Biddy, is he, the young dog? Well, he might do worse."

"You are detestably foolish, Thomas," said his wife. "A man of your age ought to know better. You should be the girl's uncle, not I her aunt. You're more suited to her."

Mr. Sotheran looked after the haughty retreating figure.

"Now, what have I done?" he muttered. "I thought she meant me to be pleased about Geoff's admiration of her niece. Poor little girl! I wonder if she's hitting it off with them. I must ask her if she's happy, or wants money or anything."

And Mrs. Sotheran's unworthy husband returned to his *Daily Telegraph*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOY'S LOVE.

“ O the little less, and what worlds away ! ”

TILL Christmas came Biddy had rather a difficult time. She found it hard to keep Geoffrey at arm's length, as she found it impossible to allow him to be more than commonly civil to her under her aunt's eyes.

With the departure of Miss Lavington the girls had become less antipathetic. They had found out that Biddy had a way of turning a bow, or adjusting a fichu, which gave the article a touch of careless distinction, and they had no objection to making use of the knowledge. So Biddy was always hearing a tap at her door, to be followed by the entry of one of her cousins, carrying a crushed and crumpled piece of finery to be set straight.

The elder girls were having a good deal of gaiety just before Christmas. Biddy would listen to their somewhat unimaginative talk of their dances and their lovers, amiably but without interest. She liked the youngest girl better, and was sympathetic with the vague discontents and desires which were imparted to her while she was doing Agnes's hair, or giving a touch of smartness to the school-girl hats which Mrs. Sotheran selected of the plainest and cheapest.

There was a blessed little interlude at Christmas when Herbert was at home, and they spent the days at pantomimes, circuses, and all manner of shows.

"You're not looking too bloomin' well," the boy had remarked critically. "Has any one been nagging you?"

"No one," said Biddy.

"Because if they have, let me know, and I'll have it out with 'em."

However, Herbert saw no indication of the things the girl had ordinarily to endure, and returned to school under the happy delusion that she was comfortably settled as a permanent inmate of the house.

While he remained, some of his mother's exceeding pleasure in her boy radiated on to his friend and familiar. But after Herbert had gone Biddy's troubles came quickly and thickly.

They began with the sudden appearance of Geoffrey, one afternoon, at teatime. His mother and sisters were out, as he had known they would be, and Biddy, rejoicing in the blessed quietness, was just settling to enjoy her tea and a novel by the drawing-room fire, when Geoffrey made his appearance.

"Why, Geoffrey, you at this hour!" she said, looking at the clock.

"Yes; you don't seem particularly glad to see me."

"You will have some tea?" she said, without answering his speech. "Your mother and sisters are having a glorious afternoon of it in Regent Street, at the sales."

"I knew they would be out. That is why I told the pater I had a headache, and came home."

Biddy did not reply, but began gathering her things together preparatory to making a move.

"Don't go," said the boy imperiously. "I haven't

come all this way to talk to you without meaning to do it."

Biddy sat down again helplessly. "Your mother——" she began.

"I shall speak to my mother," he said. "If she has been causing this mischief between you and me, it is time she understood that I am a man, and not a child."

The lad looked so handsome and spirited in his sudden fierce assertion of himself, that Biddy felt it hard they could not be good friends. She would have liked such a brother, she thought.

"I don't ask much, Biddy," he said, his voice changing to a tone humble and imploring. "You know I've loved you from the first day I saw you. I had everything to give you, for I have never been in love before. I believe I gave you all my heart in that moment when I saw you coming in, looking so frightened. I thought there never were such beautiful eyes and such dear hair. I love the way you carry that round, white chin of yours. I love you from head to foot, Biddy darling. You are all lovely to me."

"But you mustn't, Geoffrey," said Biddy, feebly.

"You know you ought to be thinking of Miss Lavington, and not of me."

"*Miss Lavington!* why, I'd never have thought of her, darling, that way, even if you'd never come. I don't want to marry money-bags. Only the mater has always insisted on my being civil to her, and the mater has kept us all in the nursery a long time."

"I'm sure it isn't my fault."

"No, darling, it isn't your fault. You couldn't have helped it."

"You mustn't call me darling, Geoffrey."

"Why not, darling? You always are 'darling' in my thoughts of you. You can't help my loving you. I don't ask you to love me, but just to be a little wee bit kind to me. Why can't you treat me as ~~you~~ do Herbert?"

"Oh, Herbert! Herbert is different."

"You don't love any one else, Biddy?"

It was a random shot, but it told. A sudden flush of colour burst over Biddy's face and neck, turning even the tips of her ears pink. She lowered her lids till her eyes were no longer visible, and averted her head; but she had answered him.

"Oh, Biddy!" said the boy, in a heart-broken voice; and then was silent for a few minutes.

Biddy was afraid of what he might say next, but she need not have dreaded his questions. When he spoke, it was to say—

"I won't bother you any more, darling. That is the one reason why I should let you alone. If it had been only the mater, or any difficulty of that kind, I would have broken through it; but now there is no use saying anything. There, darling, don't look as if you were a criminal. It is not your fault. No one could say you encouraged me."

"You're not angry with me, Geoffrey?" asked Biddy, imploringly.

"Not a bit, darling. You needn't fear I'll oppress you with sulks any more, or draw the mother's wrath on you by my attentions. I'll go out in the Park now, and get a blow."

He took up a fold of her dress and kissed it, and went out.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNWELCOME SUITOR.

BIDDY'S troubles were not over, for a little later John Ayers made his first appearance upon the scene. He was a young man, black-eyed and handsome, and was considered by city men as some one to be spoken of in tones awed and admiring. Mr. Sotheran introduced him to his family circle with pride, and Geoffrey looked up to him with boyish admiration, for he was not only a great financier, but he was fond of sport, an excellent shot, a good horseman, and, taken all round, a very good fellow.

To Biddy's mind he was a little too assertive and self-confident, but she would have liked him if he had not taken it into his head to fall in love with her. He was something very different from a chivalrous and simple lad like Geoffrey. He was a man who knew what he wanted, and went straight

for it; and there was a sense of power and mastery about him which made him rather alarming to a girl who wanted none of him.

He had stared hard at her the first time they met, a little too hard for good manners, perhaps, and immediately afterwards had openly devoted himself to her. There were no delicate gradations in his courtship. He began sending her bouquets and concert tickets, and such things almost at once, and usually followed his offerings himself about eight in the evening, when dinner was over. Biddy was overwhelmed at this new turn of affairs, and would have haughtily refused his offerings if her aunt had not interfered.

"More flowers!" said Biddy, fretfully, when they had come in one day to find a great wooden box in the hall. "I do wish Mr. Ayers would not send me flowers. I shall send them back to him."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Sotheran. "You will, on the contrary, thank him for them pleasantly when next he comes. John Ayers is a friend whom we deeply value, and I will have no offence given to him by any inmate of this house."

Tears of anger and humiliation sprang to Biddy's eyes. She went up to her own room, and sat down with her chin in her hands, thinking for the hundredth time of a possible loophole of escape from her aunt's house.

She had wild ideas of going out some day without a word to any one, and speeding back to Dublin to Peter and Mrs. Behan. She thought of the railway carriage tearing away to Holyhead with such longing as made her heartsick. But she felt that John Ayers would follow and find her. How could those poor old servants protect her? And her father's friends would be the first to say that, at her age, it was her duty to remain with her relatives.

If there was any possible doubt of Mr. Ayers's intentions, he soon set them at rest.

Biddy was at home alone, one afternoon, when he was announced, and he was standing by her chair, with his hat in his hand, before she could think what she ought to do. She felt a momentary burning indignation against her aunt, who, she was sure, must have let him know she would be alone during the hours of the afternoon.

"My aunt is not at home, Mr. Ayers," she said coldly.

"I didn't come to see Mrs. Sotheran," he replied, taking a chair opposite to her. "I came to see you."

Biddy said nothing, and he went on deliberately.

"I have come to ask you to be my wife—will you?"

Biddy shrank back.

"Oh no, indeed I cannot. Why, I have hardly known you a month!"

"I have done a good many things in a month, Miss Biddy; and if that is all the trouble, it is mending itself every day. Is that all?"

"No, I could never marry you—not if I knew you for years."

"Is there any one else?"

"There is no one else."

"Not that I should mind if there was. The best man wins, and I should try to win you all the same. Are you sure you won't say 'Yes,' and not 'No?'"

"Quite sure."

"Why? I am rich, young, and fairly good-looking, and I am sure of my career. I should be good to you, Biddy."

"I don't love you."

"But you will. I shall come back again and again, and at last you will say 'Yes.' What is it the Scotch fellow says?—

" 'I will come again, my dear,
Though 'twere ten thousand mile.' "

"He said he would come again to a woman who loved him."

"And you will love me, my pretty. Don't curl your sweet lip at me. You will love me, as much as any man could desire. I can wait quite well, for you will love me in the end."

"I shall never love you."

"We shall see. But now I'll take myself off. Your aunt will be coming in, and I don't like your aunt much, though she's very civil to me, and wouldn't at all object to me as a nephew-in-law. I don't think we'll see much of your aunt in the future."

He stooped over her hand, and, before she could prevent him, took it and kissed it.

After he had gone, smiling and undismayed, Biddy sat looking at her hand as if it did not belong to her. She wished she could put it away from her, with his kiss and the memory of it.

Presently, when the dark gathered, and a footman came in to light the lamp, she got up and went upstairs, where she washed it in very hot water, and dried it carefully. Yet she felt the touch of the man's lips there all the same.

When her aunt came in she was sitting by the drawing-room fire. She noticed Mrs. Sotheran's air, as if she had expected to greet another person, and was disappointed; and the slightly conscious manner of the question, "Has any one called?"

"Mr. Ayers," answered Biddy. "He did not stay very long."

"Why didn't you keep him for dinner? You knew I would have wished him to stay."

"I didn't think of asking him. He only remained a few minutes."

"What did he say?"

There was a sudden suspicion in her tone, and she looked sharply at Biddy, who blushed uncomfortably and did not reply.

"There, I know what he said. But what did you say? What answer did you give him?"

"I said 'No.'"

"You said 'No' to John Ayers?" said Mrs.

Sotheran, with incredulity. "You, a penniless girl, dependent on charity, actually refused John Ayers! No, you couldn't be such a fool!"

Just then Mr. Sotheran came in, rubbing his cold hands.

"Thomas," said his wife, "this girl tells me that John Ayers has been here in my absence, and has asked her to marry him."

"Eh! to marry him?" said the little man. "God bless my soul, I'm sure I'm delighted! Let me congratulate you, my dear."

"Don't be a fool, Thomas! She has refused him."

Mr. Sotheran's face fell with a surprising suddenness.

"Do I understand you to say, my dear, that Biddy has refused John Ayers? Oh, no; surely that would be very foolish, Biddy, my dear! Why John Ayers, God bless my soul, John Ayers is a man any woman might be proud of! Why, he's a great man, my dear, or going to be; really and truly a great man!"

"He may be, uncle," said Biddy, tearfully, "but I can't marry him. I don't love him."

Mrs. Sotheran held up her hands.

"Love! stuff and nonsense! This comes from the idle life you've led filling your head with rubbish. If you were my girl, I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd lock you up in your room till you came to your senses, and feed you on bread and water. I don't call talk about love in the mouth of a girl modest."

"There, my dear," interposed her husband, hastily, "don't be too hard on Biddy. She'll think it over; won't you, Biddy, my dear? Think it over, and perhaps you'll find reason to change your mind."

After this Biddy felt herself coldly isolated from every one else, and pushed closer and closer to John Ayers. If he called, he was sure to find Biddy alone; if he formed one of a circle in the drawing-room of evenings, the circle would crumble away and leave him and Biddy isolated. It seemed to be understood that his visits, his gifts and attentions were for her alone.

Geoffrey, who might have helped her, had taken to disappearing of evenings; he seemed to have an incessant round of gaieties to take him out. He had been as good as his word in not plaguing

her; though Biddy often wished he would come again and talk to her in spite of his mother's frown. But the boy's vaguely reproachful eyes only met hers now to turn away from any possible invitation in them.

Mrs. Sotheran was quite relentless in her determination to force on the marriage she had set her heart on. In a thousand subtle ways she made her niece's position in the house daily more intolerable. She withdrew her girls from the intimacy which had been slowly growing between them and their cousin. No one talked to Biddy, and she lived in the midst of blank, irresponsible faces. It was an ostracism well calculated to push any girl into the arms of a man willing to love and cherish her; and Mrs. Sotheran watched her niece daily, wondering how long she would hold out against it.

But Biddy was more concerned about John Ayers's determination to win her. There was a calm certainty, a never-ruffled patience in his manner towards her which alarmed her for her powers of resistance more than any engine her aunt could bring to bear against her. He was not ungenerous,

and, to give him his due, he was not aware of the tactics of his female ally. Once he questioned Biddy on the subject.

"Is your aunt making it hot for you over refusing me?"

"No," said Biddy, uncertainly.

"Sure? Because if she does, be honest with me. I could stop that at once."

"She has never spoken to me about it since the first day," said Biddy, with truth.

"That's all right, then. I don't want any woman's assistance in winning you. I have implicit confidence in my own power."

"You make me very unhappy."

"Do I, Biddy? I will make up for it afterwards. My patience is practically inexhaustible. Yet I should be glad if the matter were settled, for both our sakes. You are looking ill, and I would take you away out of the beaten track of tourists to some paradise of earth."

But Biddy shook her head. She was tired of telling him that she would never become his wife.

CHAPTER XX.

RESCUE.

HOWEVER, deliverance was nearer than Biddy had dared to hope.

In the midst of her fear and bewilderment, she was told one day that there was a visitor in the drawing-room for her—a lady, so, thank Heaven, it could not be John Ayers. Her next thought was one of wonder as to who it could be, for in her new life she had had no opportunities of making friends; and her wild hope that it might be some one out of her old life seemed, after the momentary throb of expectation, to be impossible.

She went down to the drawing-room, however, with her heart still beating from that hope. Her visitor was sitting in a deep chair, with the air of one to whom rest is grateful. As Biddy entered, she came forward into the light, and, at sight of her face, Biddy uttered a cry.

"Mrs. Montague!"

"My poor child, I have come as fast as I could; but I was ill, and at the ends of the earth, when I heard. Then I had some little trouble to find you."

She took Biddy into her arms, and her eyes were wet.

"So he left you to me—so much I learned from his executors. How I wish I had been there to claim you at the time! But I have come for you as soon as I could. I'm not too late, am I? You haven't learnt to make a new home here?"

Biddy clung to her, sobbing. It was answer enough.

"I am penniless," she said, after a time; "I shall be a burden on you, unless I can find some way to earn my bread."

"My little Biddy, in what hard school have you been learning, to say such things? I have enough for both. If the exchange is unequal, the inequality is against you. I ask you to be my child, the child of a childless and broken woman."

"Ah, but what has come to you?" asked Biddy, holding her a little way off, so that she could better see her face. "You were so radiant when I saw you—with him."

"Yes, I was pretty," said Mrs. Montague, naïvely,—"every one thought I was pretty. But it is a good many years ago, and I have been sick nearly to death."

"What happened to you?" asked Biddy again, with the caressing concern and pity which perhaps only an Irish voice can render adequately. "But there,—you must sit down and rest, and tell me all about it."

Mrs. Montague sat down with a tired sigh. "There will be plenty of time to talk about my ailments when you come to me. You will come, because he wished it, Biddy?"

"Because you wish it; because I long to come," said Biddy, with tears in her eyes. "But you will not long be ill. You have had no one to take care of you: that is why you are ill. I shall make you well."

"Why, you talk like my own little daughter—my little daughter, if God had ever sent me one!" said Mrs. Montague, a radiance breaking over her pale face.

Some memory stirred in Biddy, and haunted her persistently, as such things will, when one ought to be absorbed in the present, till she ran it to ground. Mrs. Montague's wistful smile, the tender consciousness of her speech, had something about them that

took Biddy's thoughts back to the day when Miss Holt had spoken to her in the wood about O'Hara. "He might have been my own son," she had said with a softness that for the moment revealed the woman under the grotesque exterior. It was an incongruous association between two women so widely dissimilar, and Biddy banished it from her mind with a half-smile, which Mrs. Montague noticed.

"You are glad I have come, Biddy," she said, "for you are smiling."

"Glad!"—the fervour of the voice spoke volumes.

"When can you be ready, Biddy?"

"At once, to-night. But will they let me go? Not that it matters, since I should climb out of my window to come to you, if Aunt Blanche should lock the door. But I would rather go quietly."

"You will go quietly. I have my credentials from Dr. Kennedy and Mr. Burgess. They did not doubt that I was the friend to whom your father's last wish gave you. But you have been unhappy here, Biddy. Your face speaks of storm and stress."

"I have not been happy. But that is all over; I am going to be very happy now. It is only," she added hastily, "that on many points my aunt and

I did not agree. My uncle is kindness itself, and there are one or two others in this house I shall grieve to leave."

"I must get away somewhere to the sun—the sun and long rest. I need them badly."

"Ah, you have been killing yourself rushing over the world for me!"

"To find my little daughter, who is going to make me well."

At this moment Mrs. Sotheran entered, and met her niece's friend with glacial coldness. Much as she loved worldly prosperity, she was not moved by Mrs. Montague's conspicuous elegance, nor by the smart carriage she had found standing at her door. If Biddy were going to have friends like this, it boded less well for her own persistent purpose of carrying out the marriage with John Ayers—a project upon which her obstinate and narrow mind had fastened itself tenaciously.

She grew still more haughty when Mrs. Montague revealed to her the object of her visit.

"Pardon me," she said; "but our niece, although she is over age, is with her proper protectors. My husband and I will need some

warranty that we are entrusting her to a fit and proper person before we commit ourselves to anything so rash."

Mrs. Montague smiled faintly, but something in the smile nettled Mrs. Sotheran exceedingly.

"I can bring any number of credentials," she answered.

"If Mr. Sotheran accepts them, and Miss O'Connor leaves us for you, I for one shall not regret it," said Mrs. Sotheran. "Her residence here has been far from adding to the harmony of the household."

"I am sorry," began Biddy, white and trembling.

"There, my dear," said Mrs. Montague, patting her hand. "I shall be glad to have her all the same"—turning to Mrs. Sotheran; "perhaps she and I will understand each other better. May I hope to have the pleasure of seeing your husband?"

Mrs. Sotheran touched the bell. "Will you see if your master is in the study, John?" she said, when the footman appeared. "If he is, please tell him that there is a lady with me, who wishes to see him on business—on *business*, remember."

Her intention so evidently was to place Mrs. Montague outside any possibility of social intercourse,

that the ostracized lady had much ado to keep from smiling again.

Mr. Sotheran appeared presently, and having been informed by his wife of the visitor's preposterous purpose, as she considered it, failed as usual to come up to what was expected of him.

He read the letters from Dr. Kennedy and Mr. Burgess carefully, with the enclosure which copied Dr. O'Connor's last words.

"I'm afraid we can't dispute your claim, madam," he said, when he had finished. "But what does Biddy say herself?"

The eyes which had never looked on her with anything but kindness, beamed now so benevolently that Biddy could hardly bear to disappoint the hope in them.

"My father wished it," she stammered.

"And you wish it too, my dear," said Mr. Sotheran, in a kind, grieved voice. "There, there, I can see you do. I had hoped you could have made yourself happy with us. I had come to look upon you, Biddy, as a daughter of the house. I really had."

"You have several daughters already, Thomas," Mrs. Sotheran reminded him.

Her husband looked at her as if he had not heard her.

"We shall hope, shall we not, my dear," he said, with old-fashioned courtesy, "for the pleasure of Mrs. Montague's company at dinner?"

"I'm afraid I cannot," said Mrs. Montague, hastily. "Indeed, I had a half-hope that Biddy would come with me, and leave a maid to do her packing-up."

"I don't encourage my own daughters in idle habits," said Mrs. Sotheran; "they have none of them maids, so I should not think of keeping one for my niece. However, there is a housemaid here, who would assist Bridget, since she is in so unseemly a hurry."

Somehow delay seemed intolerable to Biddy at this moment, so she turned her eyes away from Mrs. Sotheran's face as she answered—

"Yes, there is a very kind girl who will put my things together for me. I should like to come."

"I shall send for them in the morning," said Mrs. Montague; and then, turning to Mr. Sotheran, added very sweetly, "I am sure you will forgive me for what must seem a very rude want of consideration; but I am not well, and really at this moment find the London noise and tumult more than I can bear.

I am ordered to the sea as soon as possible. You will forgive me, will you not?"

Mr. Sotheran was mollified at once by this appeal, and the evident truth of her words. "We shall hope to see you much stronger, much stronger," he said sympathetically, "when you have had a change."

"And I will write," whispered Biddy, when she had put on her hat and cloak, and instructed the friendly little maid who had befriended her at her first coming to Surrey Square. "I will write; and remember, I always love you, dear Uncle Thomas, and I will come to see you when we get back."

She embraced the little man with a fervour his wife evidently thought to be quite uncalled for, and then, after a frozen farewell from Mrs. Sotheran, she was with Mrs. Montague, seated in a comfortable carriage, and being driven away rapidly.

"My poor Biddy!" said her newly found friend, half comically, as they drove away. The words expressed all Mrs. Montague's opinion of the lady of Surrey Square.


"Yes," said Biddy. "But Uncle Thomas is a trump, and so are the boys. And I was very fond of Agnes, the youngest girl,—really very fond."

CHAPTER XXI.

LOTUS LAND.

WHILE they were on their way, Biddy wrote a long letter to her uncle, in which she quite unaccountably forgot to give him the name of their destination, or any address to write to. A similar omission was noticeable in her letter to Herbert, accompanying a hamper, the contents of which were calculated to make him independent of the "tuck-shop" for some time to come.

The truth was that Biddy would have liked to bury herself somewhere from the eyes of John Ayers. She was afraid of him still, afraid of the unequal struggle between their wills, and of how it would end. Sometimes she saw herself, with a shuddering fascination, John Ayers's betrothed, then his wife. When she had reached this point she would fling herself on her knees, and pray for help against her helplessness, lest she should one day find herself



the wife of one man, while all her heart was given to another. There were times when she forgot all her anger and cried out on O'Hara that only he could save her, he who had never loved her, and had dealt her love for him the cruelest of all blows. Poor Biddy was no heroine surely—hardly, indeed, a woman of spirit—or she would have learned to tear up by the roots the unhappy affection which had grown with her growth, and strengthened with it.

They went by easy stages to an island Mrs. Montague had often visited in her yachting tours. It was a little place in the midst of grey seas, with a little and primitive population. The industry was flower-growing, and now, in the sweet of the year, the island might have been a raft of daffodils and narcissi instead of solid ground, so full was it of the dancing of the flowers.

They were lodged in the cottage of a fisherman's widow, who gave them excellent, plain fare, and exquisite cleanliness. Into the flower-scented and sea-scented life Mrs. Montague sank as gratefully as, after long weariness, one sinks into lavender-smelling sheets. They had brought no resource against the loneliness except a box of novels from Mudie's; and

there was absolutely nothing to do, but to dream all day in the sun, with an open book upon the knee.

At first the invalid gave way to the delicious laziness of the place, and lay on a sofa drawn to the open window day after day. But presently she felt well enough to sit with Biddy on a lounging-chair, close to the sea, where the little waves, sucked in by the sand, creamed about their feet. Day after day, it was south-wind or west-wind weather. Nothing could have been more propitious for recovery; but, though Mrs. Montague gained in strength, there was yet a sunken and drawn look about her features, a darkness of colour, which went to Biddy's heart to see.

They had long, long talks together. Mrs. Montague never tired of hearing about Biddy's old life with her father. Often the girl was betrayed by her eager listener into repetition, and when she would have stopped in time, she was begged to go on. Greedily, an acute observer would have said, did Mrs. Montague listen to these simple annals of father and daughter. But, apparently, she had nothing to say in return—nothing, at least, that intimately concerned herself.

"I am too tired to talk," she would say, when

Biddy discovered herself to be an egotist and a chatterbox; "and I would rather listen to you, child, than read the last novel;" and so there was nothing for Biddy to do, but to go on.

It was impossible that in these long conversations she should not have betrayed the secret of her love for O'Hara. When it had to be discovered, she told it all simply, though with pain and difficulty; and her pallor was more painful than would have been another girl's shamefaced blushes.

Mrs. Montague listened, holding her hand tight, and there was comfort in that firm clasp.

"Poor little Biddy!" she said, when she had heard all. "I guessed there had been something, child. When I saw you last your eyes looked outward on a world full of possibilities. When I came again they looked inward—on the past and days that are over. Ah, the untroubled eyes of a child!" she sighed. "We are different, we women, who have eaten a fruit as fatal as Eve's."

She sifted Biddy's story, though she saw it hurt the girl to talk of it. At first she had her hopes that the thing might be a misunderstanding, something her will and her love might be able to set straight.

"Forgive me for asking, Biddy," she said. "But you are quite, quite sure he acted as though he loved you? You are inexperienced, and might make a mistake. Think, child."

"He acted as though he loved me," said Biddy, averting her wounded eyes.

"And all the time he loved this other girl—this Miss Bingham."

"I was told so by every one. Only one other person thought that he loved me."

"And he?"

"It was a she. It was Miss Holt—the strange, rough woman I told you about the other day."

"What could she know, an Amazon like that?"

"I have thought, perhaps," said Biddy, hesitatingly, "that she loved some one once, and was not loved in return. I thought so that day she spoke to me about—Mr. O'Hara. For the moment I forgot her roughness and absurdity. She was not always so, they told me."

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Montague, "how many women carry that sword in their hearts unsuspected!"

There was silence for an instant, and then she went on—

"But your—your father, he thought well of him? He was not likely to be so deceived."

"He thought him honourable and true," said Biddy; and her face went down into her hands. "He made him his friend, and was in a way to love him like a son. But he never came, and he never wrote, when—when all that happened. It was cruelest of all."

Her voice died off in a whisper. If she had been looking she might have seen a spark of anger kindle in Mrs. Montague's eyes, and her thin cheeks fire angrily.

"Ah!" she said, in a curiously concentrated tone that had some deep emotion of pity, or anger, or both, "if he could so betray *him*, he must have been worthless indeed. Put him out of your heart and your thoughts, Biddy, child. It is sad enough when a woman must give her life up to an unhappy love, however worthy the man is; but to go on caring for an unworthy one!"

She made an expressive gesture of disdain, which it was as well poor Biddy did not see.

Month after month they lingered in their island of flowers, every month meaning to say good-bye,

and every month postponing. Mrs. Montague had certainly grown stronger during the time, and some lines and shadows of grief and care had been smoothed out of Biddy's satin skin. If the girl had had her will, she would have willed to remain there for a long time to come—there where the post seldom troubled them, and the rocks and the sea seemed to create a barrier between her and her determined suitor. A world in which John Ayers's name had no place, was a safe and desirable world to Biddy just now.

The summer lasted with them into late autumn, but at last it was quite over, and the island a barren place of rocks.

"Well, Biddy," said Mrs. Montague, one day, "it is time for us to move."

"Alas!" said Biddy; and her eyes bore witness to her voice.

"Yes, it has been happy here, and I have grown almost well—so well that I think I could stand London for a while, till the east winds set in. I have many old friends there, and I have always liked the little season between Christmas and Easter, when one's friends have really time for one,"

Biddy looked at her wistfully, but said nothing. Mrs. Montague was looking much stronger, and had to-day a brightness and sparkle which reminded Biddy of the old days.

"We shall be very quiet," she went on. "For I must not overdo it yet. My old friends will come to see me; and, I'll tell you what,—you shall have your dear Herbert to roam about with, and take you to all the pantomimes, and you shall make his life more blissful than any school-boy's ever was before. What do you say?"

"Delicious!" cried Biddy, breaking into dimples, and forgetting John Ayers for the moment.

"How would it be, Biddy," went on Mrs. Montague more quietly, "if, after this winter, you and I were to settle down somewhere? I shall not be able to go about in search of health, for, though I am much better, I don't think I shall ever be a very strong woman again. It must be a mild place, where east winds never come; and it must not be quite beyond the reach of civilization and a few congenial folk to talk to. Where could I find such a place, Biddy?"

"Ah!" said Biddy, with longing in her eyes.

"We have hit on the same thought," said Mrs. Montague. "I think Ireland would suit us exactly. There was a lovely place near Dublin, where we put in once: Killiney it was called, I think, a valley in the arm of the mountains, with a mild grey sea at its edge."

"Ah, heaven!" exclaimed Biddy. "And I should see Peter and Mrs. Behan again; and the dogs! My aunt Blanche would not let even Herbert keep a dog in the house; and poor Akbar had to go to the stables."

"You shall have as many dogs as you like, my dear, short of establishing a Dogs' Home."

"If I only had not to take everything from you!" cried Biddy. "If only I might be your little servant, and sweep, and dust, and cook, and wash for you!"

"And very badly you would do it, my dear," said Mrs. Montague; but her face was suffused with pleasure. "How would it be, though, if your old servants could be induced to live with us?"

"Oh!" cried Biddy again, and clasped her hands to her breast.

"We shall do it, then," said Mrs. Montague, "God willing, when winter is over."

CHAPTER XXII.

A PERSISTENT LOVER.

“Great ado there was, God wot.
He would love and she would not.”

THEY were back in London for Christmas, and, immediately the festival was over, Biddy's sight-seeing with Herbert began. She had elicited casually from that youth, at their first meeting, that Mr. Ayers was no longer a visitor at Surrey Square ; and, with her fears lulled to rest, had paid a duty visit to her aunt Blanche, and, that done, had considered herself exonerated from further calls.

Mr. Sotheran came to dinner with them one evening, and afterwards escorted Biddy and Herbert to the Drury Lane pantomime, enjoying everything with a simple zest that Biddy had not suspected in him. He was a delightful companion—so gentle, so considerate, so careful, that it made Biddy's heart ache to think of the husband he would have made for a woman who could appreciate his kindness.

She and Herbert took their pleasures usually in the most Bohemian way, going about on top of omnibuses, or by the Underground Railway, feasting in small Italian restaurants, doing twenty things every day that would have shocked Herbert's mother beyond measure.

"Wonder what the mater would say if she could see me now enjoying my smoke?" said the youth, complacently, as he sat by Biddy's side, one day, on top of a 'bus.

"She'd say it was evil communications, etc."

"Not a bit of it. She knows a man must have his smoke; though, out of respect for her feelings—hang it all, a fellow owes something to his mater's prejudices, no matter how unreasonable they may be!—I don't smoke before her. She doesn't mind me, you know, Biddy—thinks it's because I'm a boy, and for the same reason that I carry brandling worms in my pocket-handkerchief when I've no tin handy. That's the comfort with you, Biddy. You're a girl without prejudices."

"I'm not so sure, old chap. I hope you've no brandling worms in this pocket of yours."

"Wish to heaven I had! But where'd I find 'em in this God-forsaken hole? I say, Biddy, what jolly old times we'll have presently, you know, when I'm done with school and things, and set up on my own hook!"

"You'll be too busy picking up briefs to think of me and our good old days together."

"Upon my word, I shan't, Biddy! I shall always have time for you. You won't find it too long to wait for me?"

"To wait for you?"

"Yes, I consider you as good as promised to me, you know. You're not the kind of girl to single out a fellow for nothing; and, by Jove, you did single me out, had no eyes for any one else from the beginning; now had you?"

"Perhaps I hadn't, Herbert," said Biddy, faintly smiling.

"There, I shan't expect you to say too much now," said the boy, magnanimously. "It isn't fair to tie up a girl while things are still a little indefinite. Only I should like you to know that I consider *myself* bound; that's why I spoke."

Biddy looked down at the small freckled face, with affection. She repressed the desire to laugh, because of some real manliness she discovered in the boy's expression at that moment. Instead, she slipped her hand inside his pepper-and-salt coat-sleeve, and gave his arm a little squeeze, at which he looked gratified.

"Oh, but you mustn't bind yourself, dear boy," she said. "You'll probably meet girls you like a thousand times better than me within the next few years."


"I never saw the girl I could look at except yourself," said the boy, a little huffily, "and I never expect to. But of course, if you don't want me, you've only got to say so."

"But indeed I do want you. Why, what on earth should I do without you?" said Biddy, in such evident alarm that Herbert's vanity was soothed. "Only, you see, Herbert, you're but fourteen years old, after all, and it wouldn't be fair to bind you, no matter how willing you are."

"If that's all you're thinking of, leave that to me," said the boy. "Girls know nothing about such things, and I can tell you, Biddy, that there's nothing like an attachment for keeping a man steady when he's young. So, you see, it'll be an advantage to me, instead of a drawback."

"Oh, well, if that is so, there is no reason why you shouldn't consider yourself bound, if you like, Herbert."

"Another thing, Biddy, is that you're rather alone in the world, and might be glad to have some one to



punch a man's head if he bothers you too much. I thought I noticed that fellow Ayers a bit over-attentive last spring."

Herbert made a significant pretence of rolling up his coat-sleeves, and squaring his shoulders for a fight.

"Don't think about him," said Biddy, earnestly. "I don't think you'll have any trouble about Mr. Ayers. I hardly expect to see him again."

"Very well, then ; but let me know if he should turn up and bother you. He'd be a tough customer for a woman to tackle. If he comes, just refer him to me."

Alas ! when Biddy returned to Clarges Street, having parted with Herbert, who had a previous engagement, on the hotel steps, she found John Ayers, apparently very much at home with Mrs. Montague, seated in a comfortable chair in their sitting-room.

He shook hands with Biddy, in a frank and friendly way, for which she was grateful, especially since she could not keep out of her own face a consciousness which she was sure must have betrayed her to her adopted mother.

He made an unconscionably long call, but Mrs. Montague, who was usually easily fatigued, did not seem to notice that he outstayed his time.

"I like him, Biddy," she said, when he had gone. "There is a sense of power about him, a stability which, I suppose, is restful to a woman who has no great hold on anything, not even on life."

It was the first of many visits, and by-and-by John Ayers seemed to slide into the position of *ami de la maison*. There were a thousand ways in which he could be useful to two women living in a hotel, and willing to see something of London life. Even Biddy could not but acknowledge that he played his part gracefully. In his capacity as a man of business he might be rough-riding, insolent, careless of the little and weak, as Biddy had heard of him, but in his dealings with Mrs. Montague and herself nothing could exceed his delicate kindness, his thoughtfulness, his carefulness,—to be appreciated when it was a question of a semi-invalid as Mrs. Montague yet was.

And all the time he never even looked at Biddy in a way which the older woman might not share. His thoughts seemed, if anything, rather for Mrs. Montague ; and watching his strong, yet gentle ways with her, Biddy felt it conceivable that, under other circumstances, she might have liked and admired

John Ayers very much indeed. But as a lover, the old repulsion was still there ; and the knowledge that he was waiting, wrapped up in his deadly certainty of making her his wife, turned her sick with fear.

Little by little Mrs. Montague had ceased to discuss the plan which at first had so attracted her, the plan of their living together in a seaside cottage in Ireland. She never said in so many words that she had relinquished it ; but she no longer made her plans with a view to it. And Biddy was too much in fear of being told finally that she had given it up to ask her once and for all. The prospect as it faded seemed more alluring, if that were possible : but day by day it grew dimmer ; and here, close at hand, was the horrible pressing problem of John Ayers.

It was spring now, and, when Mrs. Montague had her languid days, Biddy walked in the parks, where daffodils and narcissi were blowing and growing, as in their island last year.

One afternoon she sat, full of nameless depression, on a seat by the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens, a favourite resting-place of hers after the walk from Clarges Street. It was a cold, purple-grey afternoon, when everything stood out distinctly. All the

nursemaids and their charges had gone home from the east wind. Suddenly she lifted her eyes to see John Ayers standing before her.

"Mrs. Montague sent me," he said. "She thought I might find you here."

Biddy stood up in a panic, and looked round, realizing how lonely the place seemed to have become.

"Don't go yet," the man said, putting a restraining hand on her arm. "I shan't keep you very long. I have been patient, Biddy, haven't I? I have not troubled you of late."

"It is no use, Mr. Ayers——" Biddy began.

"No use—is it still no use, my dearie? Well, I can begin to wait over again. A year, or two years, won't wear me out. You have not encouraged me, Biddy, and I should not have spoken now, only for Mrs. Montague."

"Mrs. Montague! Why Mrs. Montague?"

"She is ill, Biddy; don't you see it? And anxiety about you makes her recovery more difficult. If you could make up your mind to take me now, Biddy, and trust me for the future, we would take her away to the ends of the earth, wherever health is to be found. You can't do it alone, Biddy, you two women; but you could do it with me. Staying here is killing her."

"Ah, you are cruel!" cried Biddy, covering her face with her hands.

"Only for this moment, my lamb, and because necessity forces me. Why, I would a thousand times rather wait till you should come to me yourself and say, 'I love you, John Ayers, and I will be your wife,'—as you would surely come one day!"

Biddy lifted up her tear-stained face. "Mr. Ayers," she said unsteadily, "would it make any difference to you if I told you that I loved another man heart and soul?"

"Not while you are free, Biddy. I am as good a man as he. But if it is so, why doesn't he come and claim you?"

Biddy's change of colour answered him. He took up her hand and kissed it with the most tender devotion and respect.

"There, my dear," he said, "we need never speak of that again. Now come, for it is turning cold. I will put you in a hansom, and free you of my company for this evening. To-morrow evening I shall come, and if you can answer me 'Yes,' Biddy, you will be putting me out of pain—into Paradise. If it is still 'No,' I must only begin my waiting over again."

Biddy was grateful for the consideration which left

her alone. When she got back to the hotel she found that Mrs. Montague had ordered dinner in their private room. After they had dined, and the waiter had left the room, the question, which had been trembling on her lips since Biddy came in, was asked.

"Well, Biddy?" she said wistfully.

"Ah," said Biddy, "is it true what he says, that you are anxious about me, and are making yourself ill, and that you ought to go away?"

"It is true. I shall perhaps never be well again. But that is not everything, Biddy. I am not the one to be considered."

"You are," cried Biddy, flinging herself on her knees beside her. "You are the only one that really matters. Would it make you happier if I were to say 'Yes'?"

"It would make me happier. But that is nothing, Biddy, my Biddy. I am thinking of you. He would make you happy. He is a man in a thousand."

"I shall never be happy again," said Biddy.

"Ah, my child, you are only a child. The other thing was unreal and the man unworthy. This is a true man."

Biddy put out her hands as if to ward off a blow.

"There, my child, I didn't mean to hurt you," said

Mrs. Montague, taking the hands in her own. "But it was only a dream, Biddy; your real happiness is to come."

"Why doesn't John Ayers marry you?" cried Biddy, naively.

"My dear! an old woman!"

"A lovely, lovely young woman," said Biddy, brushing her cheek against a fold of her friend's gown.

"But it is you he wants to marry, Biddy."

The girl stood up, and there was a flash of fire in her cheeks. "Let me forget him for to-night," she said. "Do you feel well enough to go to a theatre? Let us telephone for a box, and we shall go in a close carriage. You do? Very well, darling, let us amuse ourselves to-night, for to-morrow we die."

That night Biddy's gaiety sparkled and overflowed, and her beauty drew many a glance to their box at the theatre. Mrs. Montague was infected by her gaiety, and enjoyed herself with some of the old brightness. After all, she was so perfectly sure that Biddy would be happy with John Ayers, it was easy to put away present anxiety over the girl's heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

THE morning was wet, and Biddy, though she felt a restless desire upon her to do something, was obliged to keep indoors. They had a bright fire in their sitting-room, and Mrs. Montague sat before it, cosily warm in a fur-trimmed tea-gown, and fingered the pages of a novel.

Perhaps she was not much engrossed in it. The story that was unfolding itself before her eyes was so much more interesting; the crisis of the heart she guessed at in Biddy was something to make her own heart ache more than the troubles of any fictitious heroine.

Biddy sat on the rug before the fire, saying little, but now and then casting a sharp glance at her friend. It was true what John Ayers had said. Illness and pain were written only too plainly in the delicate vivacious face. What she read there made Biddy's

heart sink like a plummet of lead. If it were possible to restore her to what she was before her illness, could any sacrifice be too great to help towards that restoration? And after all, thought Biddy, drearily, there was only herself to be thought of. No one else cared what became of her; and for her, she could endure it, no doubt, and perhaps she might die young.

After lunch the rain cleared, leaving the streets drenched indeed, but lit up now and again by a fitful ray of sunshine, bright as only spring sunshine is.

Biddy tucked in Mrs. Montague for her afternoon nap.

"I am going for a long walk," she said, "as I used to do at home when anything bothered me."

It was her first reference to the decision which had to be made.

"What hour do you expect him?" Mrs. Montague asked.

"About six," replied Biddy, with melancholy humour. "I suppose he thought if I said 'No,' there would be time to clear out before dinner, and if I said 'Yes,' there would be time to ask him to stay *en famille*."

"Will it be 'Yes,' or 'No,' Biddy?"

"God knows; I don't. I am going to look for counsel in my long walk. If he came in now I should not know whether it was 'No,' or 'Yes.'"

She spoke with such a curious bitterness that Mrs. Montague was alarmed for her.

"If you feel it like that, Biddy, say 'No,' say 'No,' though the heavens should fall!" she said, turning Biddy's face so that she might look into it.

But Biddy resolutely turned away from the light.

"Sleep well," she said, half under her breath, "and dream that perhaps, perhaps, I am going to do what you desire."

She was gone before Mrs. Montague could say anything more.

When she went out she turned away north-westward from habit, but when she reached Hyde Park, instead of making for Kensington Gardens, she crossed the Park, and struck into a network of quiet streets. She met few people as she walked, and there was nothing in the irresponsive fronts of the genteel houses to distract her thoughts, turned in on themselves.

She had walked a considerable way, when she suddenly came out of her dreams to discover that she

was in a mean street of villainous-looking houses. Her awakening, indeed, was an unpleasant one ; for it was an insolent remark addressed to her by an evil-browed fellow, one of a group of loafers smoking and spitting on the pavement, that brought her back from her dreams of old days, and her father, and O'Hara.

She stared at the man with eyes bluer than corn-flowers. This was indeed something widely different from the wild western country, where her unhappy thoughts had wandered.

"Let me pass, please," she said, a little haughtily.

The man was too low even for coarse gallantry. With an oath he made a snatch at her watch-chain. Biddy sprang away, and stood facing him with her heart beating, but her head high. Though her gaze never left the man's face, some inner consciousness took in the whole scene,—the narrow foul-smelling thoroughfare, the blinded windows, the low doors, the wicked leering faces of the group of men. Instinctively, she felt that others like them were gathering stealthily about, to share in the plunder or look on at it, according to the rules of the game.

Only the week before, she had read a story of a girl who had strayed into a Paris slum, to disappear as

utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed her. The horror of it and its possibilities, flooded her mind now, but the fear never reached her eyes, nor the proud poise of her head. She stood like a martyr, knowing full well that not beauty, nor spirit, nor helplessness, nor anything else were going to avail her here.

Suddenly a woman, dressed in black and carrying a bag, came out of one of the low-browed doors. She came along swiftly in the cold sunshine; and it might have been noticed that the men and women who had come to the doors as though to see a show slunk into the shadow when she passed.

Presently the group, with Biddy in its centre, caught her eye, and the menace of its aspect revealed itself to her. She crossed quickly from the side on which she was walking, and touched one of the men on his coat-sleeve with a white and slender hand.

"The child will do now, Atkins," she said.

The men fell apart as if they had been shot. They had been too much absorbed in their baiting of Biddy to notice the approach of the other woman. The man she had called Atkins, in whose face something of humanity yet survived, slunk out of the group

and disappeared. And then, like the breaking up of a handful of sand, the men scattered in all directions.

"Come," she said to Biddy, "before they have time to pull themselves together. I am safe here, being a nurse; but you, what brought you into such a place?"

She was drawing Biddy with her impetuously as she spoke, and had not looked at her. But Biddy was gazing at her, fascinated. The face like a white lily, the golden hair, the voice of silver,—they were Eleanor Bingham's.

"Miss Bingham!" she said at last. "You forget me—Biddy O'Connor, who was at Coolbawn when you were there."

They had emerged from the little street into a busy thoroughfare of shops. Eleanor Bingham stopped and caught her hand.

"I had looked no higher than your hands," she said. "I was so intent on your danger and getting you out of it. Why, thank God ten thousand times that I came, the more that you are who you are! But how did you come in such a place, child?"

"How did you?" said Biddy, still bewildered.

"Why, I live here."

"Here! I thought—I thought—you were living

at Coolbawn by this time; that you had—had married Mr. O'Hara."

"Married Maurice! And why on earth should I marry Maurice?"

At this moment they were elbowed off the path by a couple of women with baskets.

"Come home with me," said Eleanor Bingham. "We can't talk here, and I live close by."

With a caressing hand on her arm, she steered Biddy through the crowded street. They reached a block of workmen's dwellings, and, with a smiling apology for the climb, Eleanor led the way up flight after flight to the very top.

She opened a door with her latch-key, and signed to Biddy to enter. It was a low room, bare except for a few books and one or two pictures, with furniture of a monastic plainness and simplicity.

"Now, sit down, and get your breath," she said, pushing her visitor into a wicker chair. "I must leave you for a few minutes."

Biddy looked about her in wonder: at the iron bed, with its patchwork quilt—she remembered to have seen just such a one on blind Nannie's bed at Coolbawn; at the deal table and penitential chairs,

the white walls, and bare floor. The surprise was yet in her face when her hostess returned, dressed in a print frock, and with evidences of having made a fresh toilet.

"I will make you a cup of tea," she said,—“you must need it badly, poor child—and then you will tell me all about it.”

The kettle was soon boiled over a little spirit-lamp, and the tea made; and when Biddy had eaten and drunk a little, Eleanor Bingham came and sat beside her.

“Now tell me everything,” she said, “now that I am clean, and fit to sit by you.”

Biddy looked at her in wonder. “Yes, indeed,” said Eleanor, with her faint ethereal smile. “One is not fit for one’s friends after being on duty in Rover Street. But now tell me, child, how you dropped into that horrible place where I found you.”

“I went out for a walk by myself,” Biddy replied, “and, being absent-minded, I suppose, never noticed where I was going to till I was stopped by that dreadful man.”

She shuddered and turned pale at the memory.

“And with whom are you living that you roam

about by yourself like this? We heard that you had left your aunt's house, and gone to live with some lady."

There was a note of disapproval in Eleanor's voice which Biddy wondered at.

"I am with Mrs. Montague, my father's dear friend. His very last letter commended me to her. She is delicate, and I walk alone, usually in Kensington Gardens; but to-day I was in trouble, and, absorbed in my thoughts, I strayed."

"Ah, my dear, you must never do that again. I found you in peril greater than you know. What would Maurice say if he could know of it?"

Biddy turned away her head impatiently. Maurice, Maurice! why should any one talk of Maurice, who had betrayed and deserted her?

"But what did you mean by saying you thought I had married Maurice?" Eleanor went on.

Biddy's head drooped till her face was almost hidden. "I know he loved you. I suppose you would not marry him, after all?"

"Why, Biddy—I may call you Biddy—he doesn't love me! He loves only—only you. What are all these mistakes and misunderstandings?"

Biddy looked up at her mournfully. "If he loved me, why did he let me go in silence, and never send a word afterwards, when my heart was broken? It is you who are mistaken."

"Listen, Biddy. Maurice has been looking for you everywhere. He is looking for you now. My poor child, it has all been a bitter blunder between you. Maurice followed you to Dublin, but you were not there. Then he had to go to America about this new business. When he came back he heard of your immense sorrow. I was away then, and Mrs. O'Hara (she is Mrs. Bingham now, by the way,—what! did you not know that she had at last made my father happy?) was so engrossed in her own affairs that the news did not reach her till some time after, and then you had vanished. When Maurice came back his search for you began. He found his way to Surrey Square, and made your aunt's acquaintance. She told him that you had gone travelling with a lady, and they knew nothing of your whereabouts. She said she would let him know as soon as you returned. She has not let him know—perhaps she doesn't know herself,—for I had a letter from him only this morning."

"We have been in London since Christmas, and Aunt Blanche has known my address much longer than that."

"Then she has failed Maurice."

"She doesn't like me, but I didn't think she would be so cruel."

"She said something to Maurice of another lover, Biddy, but he did not mind. He is sure you love only him. *He* has never doubted *you*."

Biddy turned away her face.


"I am going to take you home now myself, for fear of further mishaps; and I shall write to him to-night. You love him, Biddy?"

"I have loved him for years. Oh, thank God, for the chance that brought you and me together!"

She was thinking that, but for that interposition, an hour or two more might have found her John Ayers's promised wife.

"Be good to him, then, when he comes," said Eleanor; and her eyes were full of tears. "You can never be too good to the man you love, Biddy, in this world of death and partings."

But she need not have feared. Biddy had the will to give all the world to her lover when he should come back.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW LOVE.

BIDDY raced up the hotel stairs in the old hoydenish fashion, two steps at a time, and came upon Mrs. Montague, dressed for dinner, and awaiting her return with some perturbation of mind.

"Why, Biddy!" said the latter. "Biddy! what has happened to you, child? You look like a bride, and a particularly rapturous one at that."

Biddy knelt down beside her, still wearing the innocent, rapt smile, that somehow went to the older woman's heart.

"Can't you imagine what has happened?" she said.

"It is something about your lover, I am sure. Nothing else could make the grey streets of London blossom like the rose. Where have you been, and what have you heard?"

There was a little note of regret in her voice, which Biddy noticed in spite of her absorption.

"Oh, be glad for me, be glad for me!" she cried. "I have suffered so much. And all the time he was true and tender, as I used to believe him. It has been a miserable blunder all the time."

"But how do you know in Biddy, child? You haven't been riding on a witch's broom-stick to Connamara and back?"

"No. I have met the woman whom I thought he had chosen instead of me, for whom I thought he had treated me so cruelly. It is a long story, but I will tell it to you by degrees. He has been searching for me all the time. Oh, if you could know what it is to be sure, after all, that he has not been unworthy! The joy of it is so great that I could die now without further happiness, only for his sake."

Mrs. Montague bent to kiss her. "You happy lovers!" she said, and her voice was sad. "But what about the man who possibly at this moment is waiting for your answer?"

"Ah," said Biddy, her face clouding, "poor Mr. Ayers! I had forgotten him. How shall I tell him?"

In a moment her fear of John Ayers had

vanished, to give place to a great pity and sympathy born of her own love.

“Must I tell him?”

“It will come better from you, Biddy. How could any one else tell him, indeed? Stay; I shall ask for him to be sent up here when he comes. He may be downstairs even now. And I will run away till you get it over.”

Yes, John Ayers had come in, and followed the waiter to the sitting-room. When he came he found Biddy all alone, and, finding her so, his eyes kindled. It seemed of happy augury for his suit that she should be awaiting him. He came towards her eagerly, and Biddy, who had been clasping and unclasping hands suddenly grown damp and trembling, lifted her eyes to his. They were full of a pity and appeal that smote him with misgiving.

“It is ‘Yes,’ my bird?” he cried out, and his strong impassiveness was all gone.

“Ah, no,” said Biddy. “Don’t be angry with me. *He* has come back. He loves me: it was all a mistake.”

“Good God!” cried John Ayers, and, recoiling

along at her. He stared at her with his rudely face blanched.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am so sorry! It is the saddest thing in my way of happiness. Will you ever forgive me?"

For a minute or two, he stared at her in that helpless fashion, and there was no sound in the room except the ticking of the clock on the mantelshelf. Then he seemed to pull himself together with a movement of his broad shoulders.

"Why," he said huskily, "there is nothing to forgive. I never expected it, Biddy. The luck has always been on my side. But you never encouraged me, my darling. You never wanted me: though, by Heaven, if this had not happened I should have made you want me fast enough."

This flash of the old John Ayers emboldened Biddy to lift her eyes to him.

"You are not going to be angry with me?" she said appealingly.

He passed his hand across his own eyes, as though hers had dazzled him.

"Don't be afraid of me, Biddy," he said. "I couldn't frighten you, except by loving you too

much, and wanting you, who never wanted me. You have been straight all through, little girl,—straight as a die. If you had been less straight I might have loved you less, though I doubt it. I've nothing against you, Biddy."

"So many women would love you," she said sweetly, "as I must, if I hadn't given my heart long ago, when I was quite a little girl."

"There," he said roughly, "we won't talk of it. But tell the other man when he comes that there must be no more delays, or I shall not be accountable for what may happen. I might carry you off by force, Biddy."

She stared at him, and he laughed ruefully.

"But I won't, Biddy. I'm a rough fellow, but I love you too well to want your dear beautiful body if the heart were refused to me. But if he had not come back, I should have made you love me."

She leant towards him again, and her eyes were all aglow.

"Remember this, John Ayers," she said, "that, when I am his wife, I shall be proud to remember that you loved me."

"You have little cause, God knows," he said

humbly, and in the new mood Biddy hardly knew him. "But; a few months ago, before I knew you, I should not have been the man to acknowledge it. Good-bye, sweetheart. I never want to see you again. Will you kiss me, Biddy, before I go? It is like asking you to kiss the dead, for I will never cross your path, God help me, as long as I live."

Biddy went forward, and kissed him on the cheek. Without another word he took his hat and went.

When Mrs. Montague came in, a little later, she found Biddy alone, with traces of tears on her cheek.

"What—tears?" she said, though her own eyes were not dry.

"Yes," said Biddy, mournfully. "I never thought I could have come so near—loving John Ayers."

"Only pity, my dear," said Mrs. Montague, a little cynically. "It will all be forgotten when the true lover comes. By-the-by, when are we to see monsieur?"

"Eleanor—Miss Bingham—said he would come at once."

"And so exit John Ayers, and enter Maurice O'Hara."

"Ah, well," said Biddy, pleadingly, "you see I have loved him all my life."

"My poor child, I'm not blaming you, nor grudging you your happiness. Only I can't help looking sorrowfully after him upon whom the doors of Paradise have clanged."

"He is strong enough to live it down."

"So he is. Other women will love him if he will love them. He is so strong and kind, I pray he may forget you."

"I pray he may," said Biddy. Then across the watery skies of her eyes flashed a rainbow smile.

"Ah!" she said, "but I have forgotten Herbert, my dear little true lover. He will turn away from me too."

"But not for long," said Mrs. Montague, comfortingly. "You will see that he will console himself with some strange philosophy of his own."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE OLD LOVE.

As fast as train and boat could bring him, Maurice O'Hara came.

In the meeting between him and Biddy there was a quietness despite its great joy. Indeed, O'Hara's first words, as he took her into his arms and kissed her, were of her father.

"My little Biddy," he said, "to think of what you and I have lost!"

"I minded it most of all," she whispered, "that you never came then. He loved you like a son."

He held her away an instant, and looked in her face.

"But you might have known that I would have come, no matter what stood in the way. I loved him too. But I was in America, and the bitter news did not reach me till long afterwards. You know that, Biddy."

"I was alone then," she said, "or almost alone;" for she remembered in time good Mrs. Rody Flaherty.

"Ah, yes, I can never make up to you for that, nor forgive myself for it."

"It was not your fault," she said, trembling in his arms. "But if anything could add to the horror of that time it was the feeling which was with me always, that you had failed him and me."

"Hush!" he said, soothing her like a hurt child. "You will tell me all afterwards. Why, we have a lifetime together in which to talk! You are going to marry me at once, Biddy. I shall run no more risks."

"At once!"

"Yes, my sweetheart. You will elude me no more. I felt so despairing that time at Coolbawn. One hour you were the tender honest Biddy I loved; the next you were pushing me and my love a thousand miles away from you."

"I thought you loved Eleanor Bingham then."

"Loved Eleanor! Why, didn't everything I did and said cry out to you that I loved you? And Eleanor—Eleanor's heart is with the dead; and

all her soul is given up to her work among the poor. She only waited for her father to be happy to slip away and give herself to them. Dear Eleanor, she is not of our world; she will never come back to us, Biddy."

"Ah, yes, I know now. But jealousy is cruel as the grave—and blind as the bat."

Biddy laughed at her lame conclusion, but her lover's face grew impassioned.

"You were jealous for me, my sweetheart, a poor dull fellow like me?" He laughed with happy incredulity.

"And now, how soon, Biddy?" he asked, after a moment of silence.

"Ah, I cannot think about anything. It is too sudden."

"But you must think, because I am waiting."

"Ask Mrs. Montague."

"She will not want to give you up, Biddy, till she can help it."

"She will be unselfish, though she loves me so much, or rather because she loves me. But how she will miss me, Maurice! Is she to go back to her lonely life? and she is so delicate,"

O'Hara answered the appeal in Biddy's eyes.

"Will she come to us, Biddy? The mater's place is vacant at Coolbawn."

"I think she will," cried Biddy, her eyes sparkling. "It was the one trouble, to think that I must leave her. Even in the joy of your return it has troubled me."

"We will make her strong. It is always mild as summer at Coolbawn, and she shall have everything we can give her."

"Ah, dear Maurice!"

"But there are more old friends, Biddy. Here is a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Hegarty. They have an audacious plan for our wedding."

Biddy read the letter between smiles and tears.

"HONOURED MISS BIDDY,

"This is to say that we would be real proud if you was to be married from our house. Sure it stands to reason you have no older friends. And the gentleman has made us bold to ask, let alone that the dogs, the creatures, is still listening for your step, and 't isn't forgetting them you'd be the day you were married. Your little room is

ready. You can see the mountains from it, and 'tis real pretty—your little patchwork quilt on the bed you had from a child. Herself does be giving the carpet a whisk over, and the place a dust now and again, for fear you'd walk in unbeknownst; and let it we wouldn't, not in Horse-Show week. The dogs is well, and sends respects. It's going out o' their minds they'll be to see you. The same from

“Yours respectful,

“PETER AND MARY HEGARTY.”

“Well, what do you think?” said O'Hara, watching her expressive face.

“I should love it,” cried Biddy.

“What! a hugger-mugger, hole-in-the-corner, run-away-match marriage like that, instead of white satin and orange blossoms, and a wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, from your uncle's house?”

“Ah,” cried Biddy; “but think of Aunt Blanche!”

And so it was settled. Biddy went back to Dublin to be married, and was made a bride on an April morning, with three Miss Flaherties for bridesmaids, and in such an atmosphere of praise and love as is given to few happy mortals to know.

Even then the dead were not forgotten.

"Ah, if he could have known!" she cried, the first minute she was alone with her bridegroom.

"He does know, my sweetheart!" answered O'Hara, taking her into his arms.

Biddy wore for her bridal just such an embroidered muslin as she had given to Carrie La Touche for her wedding dress. It was simplicity itself, though the effect was somewhat marred by the magnificent *rivière* of diamonds, which had come from John Ayers, and which was the only ornament Biddy would wear. She expressed a laughing regret that she could not have gone to church on Herbert's bicycle, which he had sent her, relenting at the last moment.

And, of course, the dogs, the whole disreputable concourse of halt and blind and maimed, all extremely sleek, almost ruined the bride's frock as she stepped from the carriage on her return from church.

They went to Killarney for their honeymoon, and found it exquisite in the spring, the more that the holiday season was not yet begun, and the hotels had their big dining-rooms dark and dismantled till

summer should bring the tourist. Mrs. Montague had stayed on with Peter and his wife for a few days, before going to Coolbawn to see that it was prepared for the reception of the new mistress, and presently to welcome her home.

But Biddy was not prepared for the last exquisite surprise that awaited her the evening of her return, for who should she find in the hall, but Peter in livery, and Mrs. Hegarty in stiff black silk, at the head of the servants?

"I hope you'll like your new butler and house-keeper," said O'Hara, watching her face of incredulous delight.

"We aren't past our service, ma'am," said Peter, smiling all over, "an' hope to give satisfaction. An' the dogs has come too."

"I thought it an ideal arrangement," explained O'Hara, "especially as Michael and our old house-keeper had followed my mother to Coolbawn."

But Biddy could say nothing, only shake hands over and over again with the faithful old couple, and almost cry with delight. .

And presently, when she had been welcomed by Mrs. Montague and Mrs. Bingham, Peter asked her

mysteriously if she would step into the hall, and there she found all the dogs whining and sniffing with eagerness, for they had already divined that she was come. For full five minutes they had their will of fawning on her and licking her hands; and then Peter drove them off to their own quarters.

Mr. Sotheran, Geoffrey, and Herbert visit Coolbawn regularly every summer, and it is an established custom for the latter young gentleman, now at Harrow, to spend all his vacations with his Irish cousins. Herbert has sworn never to marry unless Biddy's small daughter will some day have pity on his grey hairs; but Biddy thinks she has discovered a budding passion in his breast for the seventh Miss Flaherty which will forestall her little Nora's marriageable days. Between Geoffrey and Biddy there is a quiet friendship in which confidence and affection are about equally blended; but Geoffrey has shown no sign of giving Biddy a successor in his heart, though Miss Lavington has long ago become Mrs. Levi, or some such name.

Mrs. Montague has grown quite strong, and presides, a charming elderly matron, over a household which would be ramshackle, only for her and the

indefatigable Mrs. Hegarty, for Biddy is no house-keeper, and never will be.

She hears sometimes of John Ayers, a modern Midas and a bachelor; but though she made some timid advances towards his friendship in the early years of her marriage, he has, as he said he would, passed out of her life, and it seems likely enough to be for ever.

"Ah," she said to O'Hara one day, "it is well that you are to me what you are, the kindest man that ever breathed, or perhaps I should be tempted to regret that I said 'No' to John Ayers!"

But even Mrs. Montague acknowledges that John Ayers could have made no better husband.

